Kernberg, O.F. (1982). Self, Ego, Affects, and Drives. J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn., 30:893-917.

Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association

(1982). Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association, **30:**893-917

# Self, Ego, Affects, and Drives

*Otto F. Kernberg, M.D.*

IN WHAT FOLLOWS I SHALL EXAMINE certain issues having to do with the relation of the ego to the self, clarify my views on early development and structure formation, and suggest a modification of dual instinct theory. These issues will be explored with a particular focus on the psychopathology of narcissism and the classification of nonorganic psychopathology.

## The Ego and the Self

### Terminological Issues

A survey of the psychoanalytic literature on theories of the ego and concepts of the self reveals the existence of considerable terminological confusion. That the terms ego and self are sometimes used interchangeably, sometimes carefully distinguished from each other, and at other times treated ambiguously probably is due to the way Freud used these words, the way Strachey translated them, and the subsequent elaborations made on them by others.

Freud preserved throughout his writings the German

---

Medical Director, The New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center, Westchester Division; Professor of Psychiatry, Cornell University Medical College; Training and Supervising Analyst, Columbia University Center for Psychoanalytic Training and Research.

Presented at the panel on "Psychoanalytic Theories of the Self," at the Fall Meeting of the American Psychoanalytic Association, New York, December, 1980.

*Ich*—"I"—for the ego as both a mental structure and psychic agency, and also for the more personal, subjective, experiential "self." In other words, Freud never separated what we think of as the metapsychological ego from the experiencing self. His ambiguous use of *Ich* resulted in a sacrifice of clarity and precision, but it kept the meaning of *Ich* open-ended.

The ambiguity resulting from Freud's use of *Ich* was compounded, it seems to me, by Strachey's decision to translate *Ich* into "ego." The word ego has an impersonal quality that seems appropriate enough for Freud's structural theory **(1923)**, but less fitting for the more personal, subjective "self."

To illustrate the ways in which Strachey translated *Ich:* In the general index to Freud's collected papers in German (*G. W.* 18, p. 557) under *Selbst*, it says "*s.* Ich" (*see* ego). In the "Outline of Psychoanalysis" (*G. W.*, 17, p. 71) he talks about the contrast of "*Ichliebe*" and "*Objektliebe*," obviously self-love in contrast to object love. The *Standard Edition*, however **(1940p. 148)**, reads, "the contrast between ego-love and object-love."

In the same work, Freud talks about the alliance between the analyst and the weakened *Ich* of the patient and says "the sick *'Ich'* promises us the fullest honesty … we assure it strict discretion…" The German edition (p. 98) reads:

> Der analytische Arzt und das geschwächte Ich des Kranken sollen, an die reale Aussenwelt angelehnt, eine Partei bilden gegen die Feinde, die Triebansprüche des Es und die Gewissensansprüche des berichs. Wir schliessen einen Vertrag miteinander. Das kranke Ich verspricht uns vollste Aufrichtigkeit, d.h. die Verfügung über allen Stoff, den ihm seine Selbstwahrnehmung liefert, wir sichern ihm strengste Diskretion zu und stellen unsere Erfahrung in der Deutung des vom Unbewussten Beeinflussten Materials in seinen Dienst.

The English translation **(1940p. 173)** has it: "The sick ego promises us the most complete candour—promises, that is, to put at our disposal all the material which its self-perception yields it; we assure the patient of the strictest discretion and

place at his service our experience…" Here the term "sick ego" has been replaced by the assurance of the patient, clearly implying that *Ich* refers to the whole self. These shifts in the terms utilized in the translation tend to maintain the consistency of the concept of "ego" but do less than justice to Freud's own terminology.

Another passage in the "Outline" is more faithful, and conveys the "self" aspect of Freud's use of the term "ego." Freud states that when the *Ich* has successfully resisted a temptation it feels elevated or strengthened in its self-esteem and confirmed in its pride. The German reads (p. 137), "*Auf der anderen Seite, wenn das Ich einer Versuchung erfolgreich widerstanden hat, etwas zu* *tun, was dem berich anstössig wäre, fühlt es sich in seinem Selbstgefühl gehoben und in seinem Stolz bestärkt, als ob es eine wertvolle Erwerbung gemacht hätte*." The English translation states **(1940p. 206)**, "On the other hand, if the ego has successfully resisted a temptation to do something which would be objectionable to the super-ego, it feels raised in its self-esteem and strengthened in its pride, as though it had made some precious acquisition."

Naturally, there are innumerable examples of such uses of the word *Ich* before 1923, to designate subjective experience and self-esteem—what Rapaport might have critically designated the "anthropomorphization" of the concept ego. My point is that this characteristic—which I consider a strength, not a weakness of Freud's concept of *Ich*—persists throughout his entire work. The most dramatic example is probably his statement in *Civilization and its Discontents***(1930)** where the *Standard Edition*, faithful to the German original, reads, "Normally, there is nothing of which we are more certain than the feeling of our self, of our own ego" (p. 65). The German version says (*G. W.* 14, p. 423), "*Normalerweise ist uns nichts gesicherter als das Gefühl unseres Selbst, unseres eigenen Ichs*." Here self and ego are explicitly equated! Perhaps Freud's equation gave Strachey cause for some uneasiness, for it was precisely at this point that he inserted a footnote calling the reader's attention to his remarks

(in his introduction to *The Ego and the Id*) on Freud's use of "ego" and "self." These brief remarks constitute the only reference in the *Standard Edition* I have found to the problem. In an editorial footnote **(Freud, 1923p. 8)**, Strachey says:

> In a few places in the *Standard Edition* where the sense seemed to demand it, '*das Ich*' has been translated by 'the self'. There is a passage in *Civilization and its Discontents***(1930)**, towards the beginning of the fourth paragraph of Chapter 1, in which Freud himself explicitly equates '*das Selbst*' and '*das Ich*'. And, in the course of a discussion of the moral responsibility for dreams **(1925)**, p. 133, below, he makes a clear distinction between the two uses of the German word '*Ich*'.

But, pursuing the matter further, we find the following (p. 133): "what is unknown, unconscious and repressed in me is not my 'ego' …" with Strachey's footnote: "As Freud himself points out in the next paragraph, the German '*Ich*' here stands for something more like the English 'self'." But the sentence Strachey is referring to in that next paragraph (which has to do with assuming responsibility for one's actions and says nothing about the ego and the self) states: "It is true that in the metapsychological sense this bad repressed content does not belong to my 'ego' … but to an 'id' upon which my ego is seated."

Strachey's effort to restrict the translation of Freud's *Ich* to "ego" has had an effect on our understanding of Freud's thinking. I agree with Laplanche and Pontalis **(1973)**, who, in their extensive discussion of this issue (pp. 131ff.), claim that Freud always maintained the ambiguity, the internal tension of his concept of the *Ich*—so fatefully translated into "ego" rather than "I" or "self"—to indicate its system properties as well as the fact that, as part of these system properties, the ego is the seat of consciousness and with it, the consciousness of one's self or of the self as a person.

A second source of difficulty is the use of "self" to describe the person or individual interacting with other persons or "objects," as in Hartmann's **(1950)** statement:

> But actually, in using the term narcissism, two different sets of opposites often seem to be fused into one. The one refers to the self (one's own person) in contradistinction to the object, the second to the ego (as a psychic system) in contradistinction to other substructures of personality. However, the opposite of object cathexis is not ego cathexis, but cathexis, of one's own person, that is, self-cathexis; in speaking of self-cathexis, we do not imply whether this cathexis is situated in the id, ego, or superego. This formulation takes into account that we actually do find "narcissism" in all three psychic systems; but in all of these cases there is opposition to (and reciprocity with) object cathexis. It therefore will be clarifying if we define narcissism as the libidinal cathexis not of the ego but of the self. (It might also be useful to apply the term self-representation as opposed to object representation.) [p. 127].

Hartmann is here making a distinction that, as we shall see, permitted the development of Jacobson's **(1964)** crucial contributions to ego psychology, namely, the distinction between the self as the person and the intrapsychic representation of the person or self-representation, a third term requiring clarification.

Jacobson **(1964)**, addressing these problems of terminological confusion, said, "They refer to the ambiguous use of the term ego; i.e., to the lack of distinction between the ego, which represents a structural mental system, the self, which I defined above, and the self representations. Hartmann **(1950)** … suggested the use of the latter term (analogous to object representations) for the unconscious, preconscious, and conscious endopsychic representations of the bodily and mental self in the system ego. I have worked with this concept for years, because I found it indispensable for the investigation of psychotic disorders" (pp. 18-19). Jacobson, in agreement with Hartmann, defines the self "as referring to the whole person of an individual, including his body and body parts as well as his psychic organization and its parts … the 'self' is an auxiliary descriptive term, which points to the person as a subject in distinction from the surrounding world of objects" (p. 6n).

It seems to me that Hartmann, by attempting to free the term "ego" from Freud's ambiguity, impoverished it. Like Strachey, he wanted to give the ego concept consistency. And in placing the "self" in contradistinction to the object, Hartmann in effect removed the "self" from metapsychology. The definition of "self" in the *Glossary of Psychoanalytic Terms and Concepts***(Moore and Fine, 1968)** confirms this idea. It states: "The total person of an individual in reality, including his body and psychic organization; one's 'own person' as contrasted with 'other persons' and objects outside one's self. The 'self' is a common-sense concept; its clinical and metapsychological aspects are treated under self image, self representation, etc. See ego, identity, narcissism" (p. 88). To call the self a "common-sense concept" effectively removes it from psychoanalytic consideration. In my view, historically speaking, Hartmann's fateful separation of the concept of ego from self and of self from self-representation created a problem in the development of psychoanalytic theory, namely, the artificial separation of structural, experiential, and descriptive aspects of ego functions. This separation unnecessarily complicated conceptualizing the relations between "impersonal" ego functions, subjectivity, and character structure. For example, Jacobson's **(1964)** effort to develop a metapsychology of the experiential aspects of the self was made more difficult by what she felt was a need to differentiate, at every step, ego functions from self-functions, the affective investment of self-representations and object representations from diffuse activation of affects.

I therefore propose eliminating from further consideration, for the purpose of this discussion, the use of the concept of self as opposed to object. This concept of the self leads to psychosocial descriptions and to confusing psychoanalytic with sociological concepts, a confusion found in, for example, some of Erikson's writings.

The replacement of the topographical by the structural model of the psychic apparatus led Freud to examine the roots of the ego in the id, as a surface precipitation of it, and to the idea that the ego was dependent on the apparatus of perception and consciousness. The ego became an apparatus of regulation and adaptation to reality simultaneously with its carrying out defensive functions and compromise solutions to conflicts between the id, superego, and external reality. The structural perspective apparently reduced Freud's emphasis on the functions of self-awareness and self-feeling, on self-esteem regulation with the ego, or rather, some of these functions were temporarily understood mostly in terms of intersystemic conflicts.

However, Freud also maintained an ambiguity in his concept of the origins of the ego, and it is no coincidence that object-relations approaches as well as contemporary ego psychology have their origin in his formulation of the structure of the ego. His much-quoted statement in *The Ego and the Id***(1923)** is still pertinent:

> When it happens that a person has to give up a sexual object, there quite often ensues an alteration of his ego which can only be described as a setting up of the object inside the ego, as it occurs in melancholia; the exact nature of the substitution is as yet unknown to us. It may be that by this introjection, which is a kind of regression to the mechanism of the oral phase, the ego makes it easier for the object to be given up or renders that process possible. It may be that this identification is the sole condition under which the id can give up its objects. At any rate the process, especially in the early phases of development, is a very frequent one, and it makes it possible to suppose that the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and that it contains the history of those object-choices [p. 29]

This is in consonance with Freud's **(1914)** paper "On Narcissism," and with his understanding of the superego as also derived from the internalization of parental objects.

Jacobson rescued the self by elaborating on the concept of self-representation. And just as she found this concept indispensable for investigating psychotic disorders, so I have found it indispensable for understanding neurotic, borderline, and narcissistic pathology as well as normal development.

Insofar as the self as person is a psychosocial, behavioral, and interactional entity, I suggest replacing "self" with "character." Character reflects various configurations of normal or abnormal ego structure, expressed in repetitive behavior paterns. It is true that character defenses include the symbolic expression of self- and object representations, and have therefore, a self-representational quality as well, but the terms character defense, character formation, and character structure are more precise and clinically more useful than that of the "self" when referring to the "person."

I propose, instead, to reserve the term "self" for the sum total of self-representations in intimate connection with the sum total of object representations. In other words, I propose defining the self as an intrapsychic structure that originates from the ego and is clearly embedded in the ego. To conceptualize the self in this way is to remain close to Freud's implicit insistence that self and ego are indissolubly linked. The libidinal investment of the self—thus defined—is related to the libidinal investment of the representations of significant others, and the libidinal investment of one's own person corresponds to the libidinal investment of others (external objects). All these investments are related and reinforce each other.

## Developmental Issues

It seems to me that the structural theory, particularly as developed by Jacobson **(1964)** and Mahler **(1979)**, contains a rich and sophisticated developmental concept of the self, a contemporary elaboration of the dual aspects of Freud's *Ich*.

- 900 -

There are two aspects of Freud's **(1923)** formulations regarding the origin of the ego that have been elaborated and gradually integrated with contemporary psychoanalytic formulations regarding earliest development. The first is his idea that the ego differentiates from the id or an original undifferentiated ego-id matrix by its crystallization around the system perception-consciousness. The second is his suggestion that the character of the ego is a precipitate, by means of internalization, of the representations of instinctually invested objects. That the infant's perception and consciousness should be particularly activated at times of his actual interactions with mother, and that evolving instinctual investments of her should leave traces in the early ego's field of consciousness, is probably a broad enough statement to cover very contrasting psychoanalytic approaches. The differences, however, between competing psychoanalytic approaches focus on a number of issues that lead us directly to current controversies regarding the origin of the self (as I have redefined it).

1. Can we conceive an infant's capacity to differentiate himself from mother from the beginning of life? Melanie Klein **(1946)** and her followers **(Segal, 1979)**; **(Fairbairn, 1954)** within the British "middle group," clearly appear to think so. In contrast, Jacobson, Mahler, myself, and also Winnicott **(1958)**, **(1965)** question this idea, and assume an initially undifferentiated stage.
2. If an initially undifferentiated state of varying duration is assumed, does it contain a "purely narcissistic" primary omnipotent self-representation, or does it contain undifferentiated self-object representations? This question, apparently abstract, is nevertheless crucial, in my view, in terms of a contemporary metapsychology of narcissism.

Jacobson **(1964)** proposed restricting the term primary narcissism to the undifferentiated stage of development which she saw as one of undifferentiated drive cathexes of the "primary psychophysiological self," marked only by states of rising and diminishing tensions. At the same time, she considered the

- 901 -

psychophysiological self a purely descriptive concept, unrelated to any further metapsychological considerations.

Jacobson saw the origin of the ego as intimately linked to the originally fused self-images and object images—to what I am calling the originally undifferentiated self-object representation in it. She saw this original fused image as invested by what, following Freud's terminology, she called "secondary narcissism." She here initiated what I think is the prevalent contemporary ego-psychology answer to this question, namely, that the first instinctual, particularly libidinal, investment is to an undifferentiated self-object representation. Later, the gradual differentiation of self- and object representations will determine a differentiated investment of libido (and aggression) as well. As differentiated self-representations and object representations are built up, so is libidinal investment in the self-representation and in the object representation.

With the differentiation of self and object, the investment of the external object is experienced as a continuation of the investment of the earlier, undifferentiated version of it. Object representations and external objects are now invested simultaneously and reinforce each other. This view, which contrasts with earlier psychoanalytic assumptions about a prolonged state of the infant's psychological isolation from the human environment, is reinforced by actual infant observation and the impressively early discriminatory reactions to environmental stimuli reflecting mother's interaction with him—more about this later.

Jacobson's formulation solves, in my view, the issue of the origin of instinctual investment of self and objects—the question of whether narcissism predates object investment or whether they occur simultaneously, and it links structure formation within the ego to the setting up of internalized representations of self and object as primary organizing substructures. It creates the basis for description of the vicissitudes of self- and object representations—multiple, contradictory, nonintegrated at first, gradually consolidating into integrated self- and object concepts.

- 902 -

Jacobson's formulations contribute a theoretical background against which to view Mahler's **(1979)** research on autistic and symbiotic childhood psychosis—and on the stages of normal and abnormal separation-individuation. Mahler provides both direct observational and psychoanalytic data that permit one to trace the stages of development Jacobson postulates.

However, Jacobson's pushing back the stage of "primary narcissism" to an assumed earliest phase of diffuse discharge onto the "psychophysiological self" left obscure the issue of the origin and development of drives and their relation to instinctual investment of self- and object representations. Jacobson's formulation of self- and object investments assumes that the nature of libidinal and aggressive drives differs.

3. Still another question regarding the development of the ego and the self relates to the question of whether the self originates only from blissful states of merger with mother and their corresponding undifferentiated self-object representations, or whether it originates from the integration of such states with states of merger of self- and object representations under the impact of painful, frightening, frustrating, or even catastrophic experiences. This question is crucial because completely different developmental schemata evolve according to how one responds to it.

Probably all psychoanalysts who have dealt with this question would agree that the gratifying, blissful states constitute the core of the ego's self-feeling or self-experience. Some would go so far as to consider the building up of an integrated concept of the self on the basis of such early merger experiences as constituting the final, integrated, normal self.

In such a view, the normal self would reflect the appropriately toned-down derivative of the originally blissful merged self-object representation. According to this view, frustrating experiences and the aggression triggered by them would not be part of the original self, but part of the "not-me" experience, an external threat to the self, not intrinsically linked with it. Although

Kohut has not actually formulated a comprehensive model of earliest development, his theory **(1972)**, **(1977)** might fit this line of thinking. At a metapsychological level, this thinking permits omitting aggression from the structural analysis of ego and self-development.

The alternative concept is that self-development also occurs at times of heightened frustration and painful or traumatic experiences. Such experiences determine the building up of merged self-object representations under the aegis of frustration and pain. These mental representations are invested with aggression. They will later evolve into frightening, aggressive, and devalued experiences of the self and into frightening, aggressive, sadistic representations of objects. They eventually lead to the existence of multiple contradictory self- and object representations that are a developmental challenge during separation-individuation, and explain the pathological fixation at the rapprochement subphase of development **(Mahler, 1971)** in which differentiated yet nonintegrated self-representations and contradictory representations of significant objects determine the syndrome of identity diffusion. In contrast, the normal integration of contradictory self- and object representations marks the transition from separation-individuation "toward object constancy."

This latter concept—of self-development under both libidinal and aggressive conditions—is common to Jacobson, Mahler, and myself, on the one hand, and also to Fairbairn and Klein; Winnicott's developmental model leaves the impression of a certain ambiguity in this regard. Because in Kleinian thinking the problem of self and object differentiation has hardly been explored (with the exception of a partial examination of this issue in one paper by Bick **[1968]**) the correlation of Jacobson's, Mahler's, and my views with Kleinian developmental schemata cannot really be achieved. Fairbairn's **(1954)** assumption of an integrated "pristine" ego from birth on raises other problems in terms of developmental timetables.

Speaking metapsychologically, the concept of the origin of

self-representations and self-experience under the impact of both aggressively and libidinally invested states of merger leads to conceptualizing the self as the product of the eventual integration of such contradictory self-representations and, in the process, of the corresponding integration of the derivatives of libidinal and aggressive drive investments as well. In fact, the proposed model conceives of the self as invested with both libidinal and aggressive drive derivatives fused or integrated in the context of the integration of their component self-representations. This model solves the puzzling question of how psychic-structure formation, self-development, and instinctual developments correlate. It also suggests an explanation for the concept of neutralization of drives **(Hartmann, 1955)**.

The self, then, is an ego structure that originates from self-representations first built up in the undifferentiated symbiotic phase in the context of infant-mother interactions under the influence of both gratifying and frustrating experiences. Simultaneously the system perception-consciousness evolves into broader ego functions as well—the developing control over perception, voluntary motility, the setting up of affective memory traces, and the system preconscious. The self as a psychic structure originates from both libidinally and aggressively invested self-representations. It is, in short, an ego function and structure that evolves gradually from the integration of its component self-representations into a supraordinate structure that incorporates other ego functions—such as memory and cognitive structures—and leads to the dual characteristics implied in Freud's *Ich*.

## Motivational Forces: Drives, Affects, and Object Relations

It is no coincidence that the controversies in psychoanalysis about the concept of the self are so closely linked with the controversies over instinct theory, particularly the nature and role of aggression in early development. Analogous to the reaction to

Freud's discoveries regarding infantile sexuality that

imputed to psychoanalysis a morbid concern with an exaggerated view of sexuality, Freud's dual instinct theory has not ceased to arouse strong cultural reactions against the concept of aggression as a basic instinct. Imputed to "orthodox" psychoanalysts is a generally distinct, harsh, aggressive outlook on life as well as on patients' difficulties. Kohut's **(1971)**, **(1977)** developmental model, emphasizing the central nature of the development of the cohesive self—the motivational force of which is not spelled out and only implied as a self-generating maturational drive—is the latest of many psychological and culturalist psychoanalytic theories that explicitly or implicitly reject instinct theory, particularly aggression, and the fundamental nature of the biological basis of human development.

Perhaps a failure to re-examine instinct theory in the light of new neuropsychological and observational-developmental data, particularly an insufficient re-examination of the relation between affects and drives, has contributed to the uncertainty in our field regarding the motivational forces of earliest development, and the origin and development of drives as overall motivational systems. That this is more than a purely theoretical issue, directly relevant to the discussion of the origin and development of the self, and, therefore, of narcissism, should be evident from what I have said so far about the development of earliest self- and object representations in the context of infant-mother interaction. What follows is an effort to integrate findings from contemporary neuropsychological studies of affects and research on infant development with a revised formulation of the dual instinct theory.

Affective behavior strongly influences object relations from birth on **(Izard, 1978)**; **(Izard and Buechler, 1979)**. A central biological function of inborn affective patterns—with their behavioral, communicative, and psychophysiological manifestations—is to signal to the environment (the mothering person) the infant's needs, and to thus initiate communication between the infant and mother that marks the beginning of intrapsychic life **(Emde et al., 1978)**. Recent research has surprised us with

the description of a high degree of differentiation in infant-mother communications that is present from very early on **(Hoffman, 1978)**. Neuropsychological theorizing now assumes the storage of affective memory in the limbic cortex which, as direct brain stimulation experiments indicate, permits the reactivation not only of the cognitive, but also of the affective aspects of past experience, particularly the subjective affective coloring of that experience **(Arnold, 1970)**. Affects, operating as the earliest motivational system, are therefore intimately linked with the fixation by memory of an internalized world of object relations **(Kernberg, 1976)**.

If we assume that affective memory structures reflecting pleasurable relations of infant and mother, in which self- and object representations are as yet undifferentiated, build up separately from the unpleasurable affective memory structures in which self- and object representations are also undifferentiated, it would seem logical to raise the following questions: "Is the biologically determined activation of affects a reflection of the activation of libidinal, aggressive (or still undifferentiated) drives, or are affects themselves—rather than drives—the essential motivational forces?" Or: "Do these affective structures rather serve to link behavior with intrapsychic registration of the infant's interactions with his mother, so that the primary motivational system consists of internalized object relations rather than either affects or drives?"

I would suggest that affects are the primary motivational system, in the sense that they are at the center of each of the infinite number of gratifying and frustrating concrete events the infant experiences with his environment. Affects link a series of undifferentiated self-object representations so that gradually a complex world of internalized object relations, some pleasurably tinged, others unpleasurably tinged, is constructed.

But even while affects are linking internalized object relations in two parallel series of gratifying and frustrating experiences, "good" and "bad" internalized object relations are themselves being transformed. The predominant affect of love

or hate of the two series of internalized object relations becomes enriched, is modulated, and becomes increasingly complex.

Eventually, the internal relation of the infant to mother under the sign of "love" is more than the sum of a finite number of concrete loving affect states. The same is true for hate. Love and hate thus become stable intrapsychic structures, in genetic continuity through various developmental stages, and, by that very continuity, consolidate into libido and aggression. Libido and aggression, in turn, become hierarchically supraordinate motivational systems which express themselves in a multitude of differentiated affect dispositions under different circumstances. Affects, in short, are the building blocks or constituents of drives; affects eventually acquire a signal function for the activation of drives.

At the same time, the relatively crude, undifferentiated early affective responses evolve into differentiated affects with diverging subjective components, cognitive implications, and behavior characteristics. Various authors have classified affects phenomenologically **(Plutchik, 1980)**. The changing affective responses to the same external object and its internal representations do not, by themselves, permit establishing continuity in the development of unconscious intrapsychic conflict by means of "primary" affects.

Libido and aggression, however, manifest themselves clinically in a spectrum of concrete affect dispositions and affect states, so that we can trace clinically the vast array of affect states and their corresponding object relations to aggression, libido or—at later stages of development—to condensations of these two drives. Also, the relation to an object changes under the influence of the biological activation of new affect states which emerge throughout development and cause the quality of the drives to shift. For example, preoedipal libidinal strivings for mother change under the impact of newly emerging sexually tinged affect states of the oedipal stage of development. These affects organize themselves into genital urges operating in continuity with earlier libidinal strivings, but with a changed

subjective quality and different motivational implications. Similarly, aggression, directed toward the same libidinal object, also manifest in various component aggressive affective states, transcends each of these concrete aggressive affects, and—particularly after condensation and integration of aggressive and libidinal drives—brings about or contributes to a new complexity of object relations and a new set of higher-level or more complex, integrated affect states (such as sadness, tenderness, guilt, longing, etc.).

Should we maintain the term "drive" for these overall, hierarchically supraordinate motivational systems, aggression and libido? This discussion is unfortunately confused by the consequence of the translation into English of Freud's terms *Trieb* and *Instinkt*. Freud preferred *Trieb*, best translated as "drive," precisely because he conceived of drives as relatively continuous psychic motivational systems at the border between the physical and the mental, in contrast to instincts, which he viewed as discontinuous, rigid, inborn behavioral dispositions.

Unfortunately, the *Standard Edition* translates *Trieb* mostly, if not consistently, as "instinct." In light of the contemporary prevalent conception of instincts in biology **(Lorenz, 1963)**; **(Tinbergen, 1951)**; **(Wilson, 1975)**, the term "instinctive components" for inborn perceptive, behavioral, communicative, psychophysiological, and subjective experiential patterns—that is, affects, seems appropriate, in contrast to the use of the term "drives" for the motivational systems, libido and aggression. Here Freud's concept of psychological drives in contrast to biological instincts fits contemporary biological developments remarkably well **(Kernberg, 1976)**.

Having explained how I see the relation between drives and affects, I hasten to add that drives are manifest not simply by affects, but by the activation of a specific object relation, which includes an affect and wherein the drive is represented by a specific desire or wish. Unconscious fantasy, the most important being oedipal in nature, includes a specific wish directed toward an object. The wish derives from the drive and is more

precise than the affect state, an additional reason for rejecting a concept that would make affects rather than drives the hierarchically supraordinate motivational system.

By the same token, if drives are clinically reflected in concrete wishes toward objects, and if drives originate in affect-laden experiences with the earliest object, could not the primary motivational system best be conceptualized as the internalized object relations? Is the search for an object the primary motivational system? Fairbairn clearly thought so, and, in light of Kohut's **(1977)** final rejection of drives as motivational systems for the preoedipal levels of development, it would seem that he also thought so. I have several reasons for disagreeing.

First, the organization of intrapsychic reality in terms of love and hate is more important for our understanding of continuity in intrapsychic development, unconscious conflict, and object relations than the fact that these contradictory states are originally directed toward the same object—mother—or that, in the oedipal phase, a male and a female object are the recipients of the child's dominant needs and strivings. The relation between libido and aggression, and between pregenital and genital strivings, provides explanatory power for the contradictory relations to the same objects.

Second, the very nature of aggressive strivings results in a struggle against the consolidation of object relations and includes as a major purpose that of eliminating the frustrating, dangerous, or competing object. In this regard, it is typical of theories that consider object relations the primary motivational system to neglect the importance of aggression and, by the same token, of unconscious intrapsychic conflict.

Third, the fundamental shift in the quality of libido under the impact of oedipal developments referred to above—in other words, the central importance of genital infantile sexuality—is also typically underestimated in theories that consider the relation to the object as hierarchically supraordinate to drives.

Returning to the issue of the motivational forces determining the origin of ego and self, I think my proposed reformulation

of the dual instinct theory helps solve the question regarding the maturation and development of libido and aggression left open by Jacobson, provides a psychoanalytic model for earliest development that does justice to the crucial function of affects in activating the earliest infant-mother interactions, and explains the relation of affects to the internalization and development of self- and object representations. This view is commensurate with Spitz's **(1965)**, **(1972)** formulations regarding organizers of early ego development and also with Mahler's findings, and provides a bridge between Freud's theory of the ego as evolving from the system perception-consciousness, on the one hand, and from the precipitate of object relations, on the other, without having to assume a degree of early differentiation incommensurate with our present knowledge of infant development.

## The Self in Pathology and Normality

The fundamental reason I propose to designate as the self the sum total of integrated self-representations from all developmental stages, rather than simply a "composite" self-representation, is that this organization or structure plays a central role in development. The importance of differentiating the normal self from the pathological (grandiose) self of narcissistic personalities, and from the conflictually determined dissociated or split-off self in borderline personality organization, justifies, I strongly believe, the use of this term. This concept considers the self as a purely psychological entity whose origin and normal and pathological development I shall now briefly explore.

Jacobson **(1971)** and Mahler **(1968)**; **(Mahler et al., 1975)** expanded our understanding of the genetic and developmental continuity that exists in a broad range of nonorganic psychopathology. Both Jacobson and Mahler used a structural concept. The regressive, pathological refusion and even fragmentation of self- and object representations in manic-depressive illness and schizophrenia that Jacobson described correspond to the

undifferentiated self- and object representations in the symbiotic psychosis of childhood Mahler described. Mahler's research on normal and pathological separation-individuation, and particularly her specifying the rapprochement subphase as related to borderline psychopathology, applied Jacobson's concept to the understanding of the incapacity to achieve object constancy in borderline conditions. Mahler provided the clinical evidence that permitted us to establish timetables for the developmental stages of internalized object relations proposed by Jacobson. My own work on the pathology of internalized object relations of borderline conditions evolved in the context of that theoretical frame.

Thus, it is now possible, within Freudian metapsychology, to hypothesize, developmentally and genetically, the relation between various types and degrees of psychopathology, on the one hand, and failure to achieve normal stages of integration of internalized object relations and the self, on the other.

1. Psychotic illness is related to lack of differentiated self- and object representations, with a consequent blurring not only of boundaries between self- and object representations, but of ego boundaries as well. As a consequence, loss of reality testing is a key structural characteristic of psychosis.
2. Borderline conditions are characterized by differentiation between self- and object representations and therefore by the maintenance of reality testing, but also by an incapacity to synthesize the self as an integrated concept and the concepts of significant others. A predominance of splitting mechanisms and related dissociated or split-off, multiple self- and object representations characterizes the ego structure of these conditions, explains the defensive fixation at a level of lack of integration of the self, and the failure in the integration of the superego **(Kernberg, 1975)**.
3. My research into the psychopathology and treatment of narcissistic personalities has provided clinical evidence as well as theoretical considerations in support of the following ideas.

Although normal narcissism reflects the libidinal investment

of the self (as defined earlier), the normal self actually constitutes a structure that has integrated libidinally and aggressively invested components. Integration of "good" and "bad" self-representations into a realistic self-concept that incorporates rather than dissociates the various component self-representations is a requisite for the libidinal investment of a normal self. This contributes to explaining the paradox that integration of love and hate is a prerequisite for the capacity for normal love.

The specific narcissistic resistances of patients with narcissistic character pathology reflect a pathological narcissism that differs from both ordinary adult narcissism and fixation at or regression to normal infantile narcissism. In contrast to the latter, pathological narcissism reflects libidinal investment not in a normal integrated self-structure, but in a pathological self-structure. This pathological grandiose self contains real self, ideal self, and ideal object representations. Devalued or aggressively determined self- and object representations are split-off or dissociated, repressed, or projected. The psychoanalytic resolution of the grandiose self as part of a systematic analysis of narcissistic character resistances regularly brings to the surface—that is, activates in the transference—primitive object relations, conflicts, ego structures, and defensive operations characteristic of developmental stages that predate object constancy. These transferences, however, are always condensed with oedipally derived conflicts, so that they are strikingly similar to those of patients with borderline personality organization.

The resolution by psychoanalytic treatment of these primitive transferences and their related unconscious conflicts and defensive operations permits the gradual integration of contradictory self- and object representations reflecting libidinal and aggressive investments and, in the process, the integration and consolidation of a normal self. Simultaneously, object relations evolve from partial into total ones, object constancy can be achieved, and both pathological self-love and pathological investment of others resolved in the same process.

I am suggesting that pathological narcissism can only be understood in terms of the vicissitudes of libidinal and aggressive drive derivatives; pathological narcissism does not simply reflect libidinal investment in the self in contrast to libidinal investment in objects or object representations, but libidinal investment in a pathological self-structure. Similarly, the structural characteristics of narcissistic personalities cannot be understood simply in terms of fixation at an early normal level of development or by the failure of certain intrapsychic structures to develop, but as a consequence of pathological ego and superego development, derived from pathological development of the self as now defined.

4. The lack of controversy regarding the concept of the self as it applies to the healthier spectrum of psychopathology reflects the clinical finding of an integrated self, and the capacity for object relations in depth as reflecting the achievement of object constancy of these patients. Neurotic patients present an integrated, normal self, centered upon the conscious and preconscious aspects of the ego, although including unconscious aspects as well. This normal self is the supraordinate organizer of key ego functions such as reality testing, ego synthesis, and above all, a consistent and integrated concept of the self and of significant others. The fact that neurotic patients may have severe disturbances in their relations with others and yet are able to maintain an observing function of their ego, to present a "reasonable and cooperative ego" as part of their armamentarium for psychoanalytic treatment, is a reflection of their having available an integrated self.

5. This brings us, finally, to a concept of the normal self that, in contrast to the pathological grandiose self, emerges naturally as the tripartite intrapsychic structure is constructed and integrated. From both clinical and theoretical viewpoints, we can thus define the self as an integrated structure that has affective and cognitive components, a structure embedded in the ego, but derived from forerunners of the ego—intrapsychic substructures that predate the integration of the tripartite structure. Within

the history of ego-psychological formulations, this view represents a gradual shift away from Rapaport's **(1960)** depersonified concept of the origins and characteristics of the tripartite structure. The repressive barriers that remain in effect, and that maintain the dynamic equilibrium of the tripartite structure, also maintain the shadow of unconscious influence and control over the self, not in terms of an abstract psychic energy conceived of along hydraulic models, but in terms of repressed internalized object relations, libidinally and aggressively invested, that strive for reactivation through invasion of the self's intrapsychic and interpersonal field.

The concept of the self I am proposing remains harmoniously close to Freud's original concept of the *Ich*, the I, the ego. It remains in relation to and dependent on the dynamic unconscious as a constant underlying current influencing psychic functions.

## SUMMARY

I have explored the concepts of self, ego, affects, and drives, with special emphasis on terminological confusions and Freud's use of *Selbst* and *Ich*. I have also proposed a modification of the dual instinct theory in the light of the relation between affect and drives. Finally, I have proposed a developmental model on the basis of all the above considerations, and stressed its relevance for the classification of nonorganic psychopathology.

## REFERENCES

ARNOLD, M. B. 1970 Brain function in emotion: a phenomenological analysis In Physiological Correlates of Emotion ed. P. Black. New York: Academic Press, pp. 261-285

BICK, E. 1968 The experience of the skin in early object relations *Int. J. Psychoanal.* 49:484-486 [→]

EMDE, R. et al. 1978 Emotional expression in infancy: 1. Initial studies of social signaling and an emergent model In The Development of Affect ed. M. Lewis & L. Rosenblum. New York: Plenum, pp. 125-148

FAIRBAIRN, W. D. 1954 An Object-Relations Theory of the Personality New York: Basic Books. [→]

FREUD, S. 1914 On narcissism: an introduction S.E. 14 [→]
FREUD, S. 1923 Das Ich und das Es. Gesammelte Werke 13 237-289 Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1940 [→]
FREUD, S. 1923 The ego and the id S.E. 19 [→]
FREUD, S. 1925 Some additional notes on dream-interpretation as a whole S.E. 19 [→]
FREUD, S. 1930 Das Unbehagen in der Kultur Gesammelte Werke 14 421-506 Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1948 [→]
FREUD, S. 1930 Civilization and its discontents S.E. 21 [→]
FREUD, S. 1938 Abriss der Psychoanalyse Gesammelte Werke 17 63-138 Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1941 [→]
FREUD, S. 1940 An outline of psychoanalysis S.E. 23 [→]
FREUD, S. 1968 Gesamtregister Gesammelte Werke 18 557 Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag. [→]
HARTMANN, H. 1950 Comments on the psychoanalytic theory of the ego In Essays on Ego Psychology New York: Int. Univ. Press, 1964 113-141 [→]
HARTMANN, H. 1955 Notes on the theory of sublimation In Essays On Ego Psychology New York: Int. Univ. Press, 1964 pp. 227-240 [→]
HOFFMAN, M. L. 1978 Toward a theory of empathic arousal and development In The Development of Affect ed. M. Lewis & L. Rosenblum. New York: Plenum, pp. 227-256
IZARD, C. 1978 On the ontogenesis of emotions and emotion-cognition relationships in infancy In The Development of Affect ed. M. Lewis & L. Rosenblum. New York: Plenum, pp. 389-413
IZARD, C. & BUECHLER, S. 1979 Emotion expressions and personality integration in infancy In Emotions in Personality and Psychopathology ed. C. Izard. New York: Plenum, pp. 447-472
JACOBSON, E. 1964 The Self and the Object World New York: Int. Univ. Press.
JACOBSON, E. 1971 Depression New York: Int. Univ. Press.
KERNBERG, O. 1975 Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism New York: Aronson. [→]
KERNBERG, O. 1976 Object Relations Theory and Clinical Psychoanalysis New York: Aronson. [→]
KERNBERG, O. 1980 Internal World and External Reality New York: Aronson.
KLEIN, M. 1946 Notes on some schizoid mechanisms In Developments in Psychoanalysis ed. M. Klein, P. Heimann, S. Isaacs & J. Riviere. London: Hogarth Press, 1952 pp. 292-320
KOHUT, H. 1971 The Analysis of the Self New York: Int. Univ. Press. [→]
KOHUT, H. 1972 Thoughts on narcissism and narcissistic rage *Psychoanal. Study Child* 27:360-400 [→]
KOHUT, H. 1977 The Restoration of the Self New York: Int. Univ. Press.
LAPLANCHE, J. & PONTALIS, J. -B. 1973 The Language of Psychoanalysis New York: Norton. [→]
LORENZ, K. 1963 On Aggression New York: Bantam Books.
MAHLER, M. 1968 On Human Symbiosis and the Vicissitudes of Individuation New York: Int. Univ. Press. [→]
MAHLER, M. 1971 A study of the separation-individuation process and its possible application to borderline phenomena in the psychoanalytic situation *Psychoanal. Study Child* 26:403-424 [→]
MAHLER, M. 1979 Selected Papers of Margaret S. Mahler New York: Aronson.

- 916 -

MAHLER, M. PINE, F. & BERGMAN, A. 1975 The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant New York: Basic Books.
MOORE, B. & FINE, B. 1968 Glossary of Psychoanalytic Terms and Concepts New York: American Psychoanalytic Association.
PLUTCHIK, R. 1980 Emotions: A. Psychoevolutionary Synthesis New York: Harper.
RAPAPORT, D. 1960 The Structure of Psychoanalytic Theory Psychol. Issues, Monogr. 6. New York: Int. Univ. Press.
SEGAL, H. 1979 Klein Glasgow: Collins.
SPITZ, R. A. 1965 The First Year of Life New York: Int. Univ. Press.
SPITZ, R. A. 1972 Bridges: on anticipation, duration, and meaning J. Am. Psychoanal. Assoc. 20:721-735 [→]
TINBERGEN, N. 1951 An attempt at synthesis In The Study of Instinct New York: Oxford Univ. Press, pp. 101-127
WILSON, E. O. 1975 Sociobiology: The New Synthesis Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press.
WINNICOTT, D. W. 1958 Collected Papers: Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis New York: Basic Books, pp. 229-242 [→]
WINNICOTT, D. W. 1965 The Maturational Process and the Facilitating Environment New York: Int. Univ. Press. [→]

- 917 -

## Article Citation [Who Cited This?]

**Kernberg, O.F.** (1982). Self, Ego, Affects, and Drives. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.*, 30:893-917

Copyright © 2018, Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing, ISSN Customer Service | Help | FAQ | Download PEP Bibliography | Report a Data

2472-6982

**WARNING!** This text is printed for personal use of PEPWeb. It is copyright to the journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to redistribute it in any form.