Self and Other

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One's choice of terms always has consequences. So does one's selection of explanatory frameworks. An instance from one of Winnicott's case histories illustrates the distance between an orthodox, drive-oriented perspective on object relations and one that assumes that interpersonal relationships may reflect forms of attraction not necessarily fueled by sexual urges. A little girl called Gabrielle, only two years and ten months old, goes immediately to the toy box at the beginning of her sixth therapeutic consultation with Winnicott: "She put the two big soft animals together and said: 'They are together and are fond of each other'" (1977, 77). Winnicott responds in this instance with a sexual interpretation, one highly characteristic of his former mentor and supervisor, Melanie Klein: "And they are making babies." Gabrielle, who has already glossed her own play in a very different way ("They are ... fond of each other"), remarks, "No, they are making friends." Would Winnicott's customary, person-oriented mode of interpretation have been more accurate, and functional, at this point than the sexually oriented one? Many contemporary analysts might think so.

When it comes to selecting explanatory frameworks in the field of object relations theory, there is God's plenty to choose from. To whose work do we turn for guidance? Even if we go first to the theory of object relations explicit and implicit in Freud, we cannot fail to be aware that the ensuing history of the development of object relations theory constitutes a complex and often conflicting response to his work in this area. Can we rely on the innovations of Melanie Klein, who still has many
followers? Or can we perhaps find better guidance in the work of Fairbairn, or Winnicott, or Guntrip, or Sullivan, or Bowlby, or Kohut? Practitioners of various kinds frequently associate themselves with the object relations theory of a particular individual, Winnicott and Kohut being popular choices these days. Alternatively, many choose to be eclectic, often without thinking about it, by adopting a casual mixture of views: some Freud, for instance, with a helping of Klein, a dollop of Winnicott, and a lacing of Kohut. More commendable than passive eclecticism, surely, are deliberate attempts on the part of theoreticians to effect syntheses of earlier views, such as Kernberg’s attempted integration of “object-relations theory with psychoanalytic instinct theory and a contemporary ego psychological approach” (1976, 131). The problem in this case is that the proposed synthesis may prove to be unworkable because of incompatibilities inherent in the explanatory frameworks.

Virtually all current psychoanalytic schools of thought agree substantially on the fundamental importance of object relations, yet no consensus about these matters exists at present according to Greenberg and Mitchell (1983). To be more precise, they say that “underlying the apparent diversity of contemporary psychoanalytic theory there is a convergence of basic concerns” (2). It would be still more exact to speak not of “a convergence” but, in the plural, of convergences, or groups, of basic concern. Thus, for convenience, one may designate two major groups of object relations theory as drive oriented and person oriented. It may then be asked, should we select a person-oriented theory like those of Sullivan and Fairbairn, or a drive-oriented one like those of Freud and Melanie Klein? Or can we live with both, in a state of enlightened complementarity analogous to living with both wave and corpuscle theories of the behavior of light, as Greenberg and Mitchell imply is possible—and perhaps even desirable insofar as it may give rise to a “creative dialogue” between the two (408; cf. Mitchell, 1988)? Collateral questions then unfold. Is it possible to invest heavily in a person-oriented theory while retaining some interest in drive theory, as Winnicott appears to do? And if we totally reject drive theory, as Bowlby does, how satisfactory is attachment theory, which he considers to be a theory of object relations (1969, 17)? Does the strength of its empirical basis compensate for an orientation to outer reality that slight the inferable existence, volatility, and complexity of intrapsychic constellations of internalized objects, and that in rejecting libido theory neglects to account in any detail for sexual behavior?

The essential problem for the psychoanalyst, as Schafer sees it, is the
problem of “finding the right balance” (1983, 293). He refers specifically to how much emphasis should be placed on the “inner world” and the “outer world.” “How much do you talk about real interactions and how much do you talk about the analysand’s fantasizing, particularly the unconscious infantile aspects of what is fantasized?” (292). One can think of other “balancing acts” that need to be considered as well, such as the possible “correct balance” between a self-oriented theory of object relations, such as Stern’s (1985), which not only regards an emergent self- hood as being present in neonates from virtually the beginning of life outside the womb but also privileges self over other in modeling object- relational interactions, and, in contrast, an other-oriented theory such as that of Lacan, for whom autonomy is unthinkable because “man’s desire is the desire of the Other” (1977, 158). Another balancing act would have to deal with the possible equilibrium between models of object relations relying on the concept of a coherent, specialized, centered ego, as in ego psychology, as distinguished from models depending on a decentered conception of self, or “subject,” one dispersed in language and culture, like Lacan’s—or, to take a less extreme and very different instance, the comparatively decentered, systemic conceptualization of behavioral control envisioned by Peterfreund (1971), who rejects the concept of ego in its structural sense.

All terms remain suspect. This chapter, which does not aspire to be a “balanced,” neutral account, or a systematic survey, endeavors to compare the two broad orientations in object relations theory already referred to as drive oriented and person oriented. Other writers employ different sets of terms to make a comparable distinction. Greenberg and Mitchell use “drive/structure model” and “relational/structure model” (20), phrasings that seem to me not only awkward but seriously problematic because of the way they imply a commitment to Freud’s structural theory, a difficulty Mitchell finesses later (1988, viii) by treating object relations as part of a “relational theory” that excludes drive theory and ego psychology. Eagle provides another instance of inconsistent terminology when he writes dichotomously of “Freudian instinct theory” as against “a psychology of object relations” (1984, 19)—as though there were no overlap. In one sense, of course, there is no middle ground here. Yet we need to make room, as Eagle does in his discussions, for elements of object-relational theory in Freud, a situation I try to account for by speaking of the “drive-oriented” object relations theory of Freud and some of his followers without excluding the possibility of the presence of traces of drive theory
in the positions of figures who are fundamentally person-oriented, like Winnicott. A clearer, more precise sense of what the terms "drive-oriented" and "person-oriented" are meant to convey will unfold as discussion proceeds. Meanwhile these two categories are intended to provide a set of coordinates in terms of which to argue the claim that contemporary psychoanalysis needs to adopt a person-oriented theory of object relations, more unreservedly than it already has, in order to be free of the defects of Freud's drive-oriented emphasis and to be responsive to empirical findings and clinical evidence concerning the formative role of interpersonal relationships in human development.

FREUD’S MIXED LEGACY

The origins of many of the intractable difficulties of Freud’s early theorizing can be located in the formulations of *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905b). One of the most momentous of these derives from Freud’s insistence on isolating “the sexual aim” from “the sexual object” (1905b, 135–36). He argues that abnormal sexuality shows that “the sexual instinct and the sexual object are merely soldered together” (148). He urges us to “loosen the bond” in our minds because “it seems probable that the sexual instinct is in the first instance independent of its object,” and shortly thereafter he stresses that under a great many circumstances “the nature and importance of the sexual object recedes into the background” (149). This emphasis allows Freud to valorize sexuality at the expense of object relations, such as when he remarks that children behave “as though their dependence on the people looking after them were in the nature of sexual love,” adding, “Anxiety in children is originally nothing other than an expression of the fact that they are feeling the loss of the person they love” (224). Freud’s language also performs the maneuver of constituting all objects as sexual objects, by definition, with the paradoxical result that while sexuality can be discussed more or less independently from objects, objects themselves can never be divorced from sexuality, a position that soon hardens into doctrine. Further instances of Freud’s perspective can be found in the following statements, some of them from late in his career. After claiming that “sexual life does not begin only at puberty, but starts . . . soon after birth” (1940, 152), Freud goes on to characterize the child’s tie to his mother as an erotic one: “A child’s first erotic object is the mother’s breast that nourishes it; love has its origin in
attachment to the satisfied need for nourishment” (1940, 188). He adds, in the language of seduction theory, “By her care of the child’s body she becomes its first seducer” (188). Thus it is that Freud comes to regard all initial object relations as incestuous in their essential character, all subsequent relations as tainted by the lingering psychological influence of the earliest ones (1905b, 225–28), and he even goes so far as to think of “an excess of parental affection” (223) as potentially harmful.

Freud’s conceptualization of sexual behavior as instinctive does not, in itself, constitute a problem within the scope of the issues being considered here, though it should be noted that in place of speaking of “the sexual instinct,” as Freud does, I shall try to speak instead of “sexual behavior” in order to remain closer to the actualities of human experience and to avoid the common tendency in psychoanalysis to reify abstractions (as in the case of such nominative phrases as “the unconscious,” “the ego,” “the libido,” and so on). Neither does Freud’s construction of a general theory of the development of human sexuality from particular bodily zones and events and experiences and stages into the more complex design of adult sexuality constitute a stumbling block, though judgment may be reserved with regard to specific features of this developmental theory. Nature does not make jumps, as an ancient proverb reminds us, so adult sexuality cannot be supposed to blossom overnight out of nowhere. What do constitute major problems with Freud’s early theories are, first, his assumption that sexual experience, including fantasy, serves as a privileged arena of psychological conflict; and, second, his metapsychological suppositions known collectively as libido theory. I address the latter problem first.

An endless source of confusion in psychoanalysis results from the common practice of casually using “libidinal” as a synonym for “sexual.” Doing so effectively blurs two levels of discourse, the high level of abstraction belonging to libido theory and the clinical, everyday level of immediate observation and experience. Freud himself obscures the difference at the outset of *Three Essays* by equating the term *libido*, Latin for “pleasure,” with “sexual instinct” (1905b, 135). Later he calls it “the energy of the sexual instinct” (163). He thinks of this sexual energy as a psychic, or “mental” energy, a “force” (177). Freud’s inclination to describe the action of the libido in the naively concrete language of hydraulic flow has been a target of widespread criticism. Freud depicts “the libido” as flowing through “channels” that are like “inter-communicating pipes” (151n); these “mental forces” can be dammed up, and “diverted” (178), and of
course “repressed”; in some cases “the libido behaves like a stream whose main bed has become blocked. It proceeds to fill up collateral channels which may hitherto have been empty” (170). Elsewhere Freud describes libido in highly abstract ways: “We have defined the concept of libido as a quantitatively variable force which could serve as a measure of processes and transformations occurring in the field of sexual excitation” (217) and as “a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work” (168). Freud explicitly distinguishes “libidinal and other forms of psychical energy” from the energy made available by metabolic processes (217), lest there be any question on that score. But the more one reads, the more difficult it becomes to decide just exactly what Freud did have in mind by the concept of libido—quite apart from the problem of whether or not this concept can be found to correspond to anything in the real world, a problem to be addressed late in this chapter in the context of considering various published critiques of libido theory. In any case, it becomes understandable that even those discriminating and indefatigable lexicographers, Laplanche and Pontalis, lamely concede that “the concept of libido itself has never been clearly defined” (1973, 239).

Although related ideas of Freud involving such distinctions as those between the sexual instincts and the ego instincts, and the distinction between ego-libido and object-libido, will be passed over for the time being, it will be useful to dwell for a moment on the comparison Freud makes between the sexual instinct and what he refers to as “the herd instinct” (1923, 257). Freud doubts the innateness of any social instinct, but he believes that even if it were innate it could probably “be traced back to what were originally libidinal object-cathexes” (258). He claims that the social instincts belong to a class of aim-inhibited sexual impulses. “To this class belong in particular the affectionate relations between parents and children, which were originally fully sexual, feelings of friendship, and the emotional ties in marriage which had their origin in sexual attraction” (258). These assumptions on his part stand in stark contrast to those of person-oriented object relations theory in general and to attachment theory in particular, as later discussion will emphasize.

The underlying purpose of Freud’s theory of sexuality is to account for neuroses, “which can be derived only from disturbances of sexual life” (1905b, 216). In “My Views on the Part Played by Sexuality in the Aetiology of the Neuroses” (1906) Freud summarizes his position. Although he says he had earlier attributed to sexual factors “no more significance than any other emotional source of feeling” (1906, 272), he
eventually arrives at a different decision: "The unique significance of sexual experiences in the aetiology of the psychoneuroses seemed to be established beyond a doubt; and this fact [in midsentence an opinion becomes a "fact"] remains to this day one of the cornerstones of my theory [of neurosis]" (1906, 273; italics added). These experiences lie in "the remote past" of the developmental continuum (274). Freud mentions one further constraint: for childhood sexual experiences to be pathogenic, they must have been conflictful (have been repressed), the reason being that some individuals who experience sexual irregularities in childhood do not become neurotic (276–77). This qualification can be regarded as a pivotal one. If the essential etiological factor is the presence of conflict, as distinct from what kind of situation is involved, then it may turn out that conflicts relating to sexuality are by no means unique in the sense of constituting the sole class of crippling influences. From the perspective of a person-oriented theory of object relations, in contrast, conflicts with important others may or may not include sexual elements, but if the others are important persons, such as parents, the potential for serious conflict must necessarily be of a high order whether or not sexual factors are present.

What is plain to see is the mixed nature of Freud's legacy. Try as he will, his theory of sexual motivation (as distinct from his theory of sexual development) never manages to divorce sexual impulses from objects more than momentarily, and analytically—in the root sense of the word (from *analyein*, to "break up"). It therefore becomes reasonable to say that in addition to a drive-oriented motivational theory he bequeaths elements of a person-oriented theory of object relations, especially if one thinks about the relative weight of object-relational factors in the oedipus complex. The same point holds true a fortiori with regard to the transference, which is nothing if not a replication of variants of earlier object relations. Also worth mentioning here, if only in passing, is the object-relational orientation of the mental processes known as incorporation, introjection, and identification, particularly where Freud talks about the internalization of aspects of an object relation, as in the case of the development of superego functions, and the introjection of an object in the instance of mourning. While it is true that Freud conceptualizes the "introjection of the object into the ego" as "a substitute for a libidinal object-tie" (1921, 108), one has only to replace "libidinal" by "emotional" for such a passage to be harmonious with a person-oriented perspective.
CONTRIBUTIONS TO OBJECT RELATIONS THEORY

The task of identifying various contributions, other than Freud’s, to the development of a person-oriented position in psychoanalysis begins with Melanie Klein. She may be thought of as an amphibian, a creature who swims in the great sea of Freudian instinct theory but travels as well on the solid land of object relations. She accepts libido theory without reservation. She does more than merely accept the idea of a death instinct. She embraces it, thinking of it as innate in infants and as giving rise to fears of annihilation and persecutory anxiety (1952a, 198). Her views of the importance of human sexuality parallel Freud’s and often take the form of comparably extreme statements, such as her claim that behind every [!] type of play activity of children “lies a process of discharge of masturbatory phantasies” (1932, 31). Grosskurth, writing in connection with the case of Richard, quotes E. R. Geleerd as remarking, “Klein’s random way of interpreting does not reflect the material [of the Richard case] but, rather, her preconceived theoretical assumptions regarding childhood development” (1986, 270). Grosskurth then quotes from her own interview with Richard:

The only toys I can remember were the battleships. I mentioned to you this morning that I remember going on about the fact that we were going to bomb the Germans, and seize Berlin, and so on and so on and then Brest. Melanie seized on b-r-e-a-s-t, which of course was very much her angle. She would often talk about the “big Mummy genital” and the “big Daddy genital,” or the “good Mummy genital” or the “bad Daddy genital” . . . a strong interest in genitalia. (273)

In Klein’s defense it is only fair to say that her preoccupation with aggression balances her interest in sexuality. As Dr. David Slight, another of her analysands, put it, “Freud made sex respectable, and Klein made aggression respectable” (Grosskurth 1986, 189).

In contrast to her reliance on instinct theory, on the other hand, Klein’s work has been celebrated for its conceptualization of a personal world of internalized objects, “a world of figures formed on the pattern of the persons we first loved and hated in life, who also represent aspects of ourselves” (Riviere 1955, 346). In its early stages, this is a terrifying world: “The idea of an infant of from six to twelve months trying to destroy its mother by every method at the disposal of its sadistic tendencies—with its teeth, nails and excreta and with the whole of its body,
transformed in imagination into all kinds of dangerous weapons—presents a horrifying, not to say unbelievable, picture to our minds” (Klein 1932, 187). Before they become whole ones, the objects of this world are “part objects” by virtue of the process of splitting: “The good breast—external and internal—becomes the prototype of all helpful and gratifying objects, the bad breast the prototype of all external and internal persecutory objects” (1952a, 200). Worth noting is the frequency with which Klein broadens sexuality and aggression into experience-near terms like “love” and “guilt”: “Synthesis between feelings of love and destructive impulses towards one and the same object—the breast—give rise to depressive anxiety, guilt, and the urge to make reparation to the injured love object, the good breast” (1952a, 203). The objects of this inner world follow law-like mental processes, among them, introjection, projection, and projective-identification. Most important for its implications for a person-oriented theory of object relations, Klein envisions a world of internalized objects in which sexual aims and sexual objects are not, as in Freud, isolated from each other: “There is no instinctual urge, no anxiety situation, no mental process which does not involve objects, external or internal; in other words, object-relations are at the centre of emotional life” (1952b, 53).

Because of the extent to which he repudiated instinct theory in favor of an object-relations orientation, Fairbairn’s role was even more pivotal than Klein’s. Fairbairn did away with the death instinct, and with the id. He states the relevant positions succinctly in his synopsis (1963): “There is no death instinct; and aggression is a reaction to frustration or deprivation” (224). “Since libido is a function of the ego and aggression is a reaction to frustration or deprivation, there is no such thing as an ‘id’” (224). He almost, but not quite, did away with libido as well, his most revolutionary statement in this regard being, “The ego, and therefore libido, is fundamentally object-seeking” (224). Fairbairn launched what looked like a frontal, all-out attack on libido theory in his 1941 paper, where he devoted an early section of the paper to “the inherent limitations of the libido theory,” arguing that the time has come for classic libido theory to be transformed into a theory of object relations, that “the great limitation of the present libido theory as an explanatory system resides in the fact that it confers the status of libidinal attitudes upon various manifestations which turn out to be merely techniques for regulating the object-relationships of the ego,” and that “the ultimate goal of libido is the object” (1952, 31; italics Fairbairn’s). Although Fairbairn did not fully
and officially liberate himself from the concept of libido, he may be said to have done so in a virtual way. One sees this change, for example, in the case he mentions of a female patient so desperate for attention and affection from her father, a detached and unapproachable man, that the thought occurs to her one day, “Surely it would appeal to him if I offered to go to bed with him!” (1952, 37). Fairbairn’s “take” on this thought is that it constitutes a kind of pseudo-incest: “Her incestuous wish thus represented a desperate attempt to make an emotional contact with her object” (37; italics added). Later he adds, “What emerges as clearly as anything else from the analysis of such a case is that the greatest need of a child is to obtain conclusive assurance (a) that he is genuinely loved as a person by his parents, and (b) that his parents genuinely accept his love” (39). The frustration of not being loved, and not having his love accepted, “is the greatest trauma that a child can experience,” writes Fairbairn (40), who, in contrast to Freud’s tendency to think in terms of quantities of excitation, stresses “the quality of dependence upon the object” (40) and, by implication, the quality of treatment by the object.

Fairbairn needs to be recognized as an important forerunner of attachment theory, especially in connection with his remarks on wartime neurosis and psychosis. His experience of military cases leaves him in no doubt that “the chief predisposing factor in determining the breakdown of a soldier . . . is infantile dependence upon his objects,” the most distinctive feature of military breakdowns being “separation-anxiety” (1952, 79–80). He discusses several cases (256–88). The drift of the problems is that those who seem to need to go home because they are ill in actuality become psychologically ill because they need to go home! In line with what Fairbairn has in common with attachment theory (though in a different context), Greenberg and Mitchell remark that for Fairbairn “the essential striving of the child is not for pleasure but for contact. He needs the other. If the other is available for gratifying, pleasurable exchange, the child will enter into pleasurable activities.” But if the parent offers only painful or unfulfilling contacts, they add, “the child does not abandon the parent to search for more pleasurable opportunities. The child needs the parent, so he integrates his relations with him on a suffering, masochistic basis” (1983, 173).

The work of Winnicott is so well known and so uncontroversial as to warrant summarizing his contributions to person-oriented object relations theory with a brevity disproportionate to his influence. Not being a systematic theorist may have made it easier for him to retain his official
allegiance to traditional instinct theory while in practice he sustained a decidedly person-oriented position, with only occasional lapses, such as the Kleinian tenor of his technique with the so-called Piggle case mentioned earlier. Winnicott’s contributions to person-oriented theory take many forms, one of them being his enlargement of the psychoanalytic scene by paying at least as much attention to children’s actual relationships with their real mothers as he did to their internalized (m)others. He regarded Klein as giving lip service to environmental factors but as being temperamentally incapable of giving them their due (1962, 177). Winnicott’s concepts of transitional objects and transitional phenomena continue to be influential, as does the attention he paid to object-relational aspects of the location of cultural experience and the nature of the creative process (1971). He also helped to survey the location of the origin of madness by pinning it down, essentially, to the experience of separation anxiety (1971, 97), a position consonant with Fairbairn’s assumptions about the development of wartime psychosis. Characteristic of the fundamental soundness of Winnicott’s ideas about object relations, and perhaps representative of other things that might be included among his contributions, is his understanding of the importance of the possibility of self-object differentiation taking place without triggering unbearable feelings of interpersonal isolation. He understood the paradox that only in the presence of their mothers can children develop the capacity to be alone (1958, 29–36), and the further paradox that separateness (in the sense of being alone but not lonely) can be experienced without the loss of a sense of relatedness by virtue of the possibility of the benign internalization of the good object, and by virtue of what Winnicott refers to as the “use” of an object (1971, 86–94).

Guntrip, who enjoyed the distinct advantage of being analyzed by both Fairbairn and Winnicott (see Guntrip 1975), makes his own contribution in the form of integrating the views of others. “The history of psychoanalysis is the history of the struggle for emancipation, and the slow emergence, of personal theory or object-relational thinking” he writes in his last book (1971, 46), where he records these developments. After criticizing Freud’s libido theory as mechanistic and nonpsychological (31–34), Guntrip classifies sexuality as an “appetite,” like hunger, thirst, excretion, and other bodily needs, and remarks, “The appetites can all be endowed with personal-relationship significance” (35). “I have never yet met any patient,” he adds, “whose overintense sexuality and/or aggression could not be understood in object-relational terms, as resulting from too
great and too early deprivations of mothering and general frustration of healthy development in his childhood” (40). In praise of Klein’s contribution he writes, “She arrived at the fundamental truth that human nature is object-relational in its very essence, at its innermost heart” (58). Guntrip also pays tribute to the strength of the social elements in the work of figures like Sullivan and Erikson. What seems most distinctive about Guntrip’s achievement in the context of the present discussion is his adoption of a definitive position, one fully embracing a person-oriented theory of object relations while rejecting drive-oriented explanations. At the same time, Guntrip contrives to be reality oriented (in the sense of external, interpersonal relationships) without obliterating, as attachment theory tends to do, the equally real realm of internalized object-relational processes.

While not all contributions to the development of a person-oriented theory of object relations lend themselves to easy categorization, the group of figures Greenberg and Mitchell devote a chapter to under the heading of “Interpersonal Psychoanalysis” can scarcely be overlooked. Greenberg and Mitchell maintain that interpersonal psychoanalysis, unlike classical Freudian drive theory, does not qualify as an integrated theory. “It is instead a set of different approaches to theory and clinical practice held together by shared underlying assumptions and premises, drawing in common on what we have characterized as the relational/structural model” (1983, 79). The key figures of the group, Harry Stack Sullivan, Erich Fromm, Karen Horney, Clara Thompson, and Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, began with a common starting point, “a conviction that classical drive theory was fundamentally wrong in its basic premises concerning human motivation,” and shared in common the belief “that classical Freudian theory underemphasized the larger social and cultural context” (80). Greenberg and Mitchell mention Sullivan’s claim that every major aspect of Freudian drive theory can be understood better in the context of interpersonal and social processes (87), in which connection they quote this passage: “A personality can never be isolated from the complex of interpersonal relations in which the person lives and has his being” (90). Sullivan’s pair of theorems concerning what he refers to as “the tension of anxiety,” which I quote because of their parallel to the assumptions of attachment theory, constitute an illustration of his interpersonal emphasis. The first theorem reads, “The observed activity of the infant arising from the tension of needs induces tension in the mothering one, which tension is experienced as tenderness and as an impulsion to
activities toward the relief of the infant's needs” (1953, 39). The second one reads, “The tension of anxiety, when present in the mothering one, induces anxiety in the infant” (41).

The enlargement of a person-oriented theory of object relations so as to include attachment theory is so substantial a task that discussion of the work of Bowlby and his followers will be reserved until chapter 2, except to say in passing that the concept of attachment provides a broad, fundamentally sound, empirically well-substantiated explanation of a realm of behavior crucial to the concerns of psychoanalysis.

Still to be considered are two important figures on the American scene: Margaret Mahler and Heinz Kohut. The work of both figures leans in the direction of person-oriented object relations while harking back, in various ways and to differing degrees, to a drive-oriented position. Greenberg and Mitchell shrewdly point in this connection to the dual referents of Mahler's concept of symbiosis, which denotes an actual relationship, that between infant and mother, and an intrapsychic event, a fantasy: "It is at once a description of the behavior of two people and a metapsychological explanation of the behavior of one of them" (1983, 286). Thus Mahler creates "an interface between a developmental theory of object relations and a drive-model metapsychology" (286)—or at least tries to. Greenberg and Mitchell call into question "the extent to which she has integrated her observations into the explanatory framework of drive theory" (294). For his part, Eagle believes that Mahler’s concepts of “symbiotic gratification and particularly separation-individuation are most meaningfully understood, not in terms of (sexual and aggressive) drive gratification, but in terms of attachment behavior” (1984, 25). As for Kohut, his early work utilizes libido theory pervasively. He refers, for example, to the self itself as a structure “cathected with instinctual energy” (1971, xv), and speaks of “idealizing narcissistic libido” as “the main source of libidinal fuel” (40) for culturally valued activity (Freud's concept of sublimation, in essence). Kohut's later work (1977) radically qualifies his reliance on drive theory in a way that makes many of his formulations seem not all that different from British object relations theory (which he seldom refers to; he employs the term “self-object” in those situations in which non-Kohutians would simply use “object”). Kohut writes that drive experiences are “subordinated to the child's experience of the relation between the self and the self-objects” (1977, 80; italics added). "The infantile sexual drive in isolation is not the primary psychological configuration. . . . The primary psychological configuration (of which the drive
is only a constituent) is the experience of the relation between the self and the empathic self-object" (1977, 122). Yet the incidence of Kohut's references to drive theory remains high in his later work. Another complication lies in the way Freud's concept of narcissism, itself born of libidinal theory, constitutes the cornerstone of Kohut's self psychology. Mahler and Kohut may both be read, if one is so inclined, as important figures in the inexorable advance of person-oriented object relations theory, even though their loyalties to drive-oriented theory proved more than mildly intractable.

**DRIVE THEORY: CRITIQUES AND DEFENSES**

Most of the discussion in the previous section concerning the relative merits of drive-oriented and person-oriented object relations theories proceeded without the benefit of considering various frontal attacks on drive theory that have been launched during recent decades from within the pale of psychoanalysis. Critiques by Holt, Rubinstein, G. S. Klein, Bowlby, Rosenblatt and Thickstun, Peterfreund, and Breger will be treated as representative. These figures belong to no easily definable psychoanalytic school. With the notable exception of Bowlby, their critiques do not arise in the immediate context of object relations theory. Because of the length and complexity of these studies, only a sampling of the views put forth can be mentioned here.

Holt (1965) examines the biological assumptions of Freud's theory deriving from his teachers (all of the school of Helmholtz: against vitalism and preaching the doctrine of physicalistic physiology), in particular Freud's adoption of Brücke's reflex-arc model of brain activity. At one point Holt lists a number of "biological facts" Freud would have deemed significant had he known them: the fact that "the nervous system is perpetually active"; the fact that "the effect of stimulation is primarily to modulate the activity of the nervous system"; the fact that "the nervous system does not transmit energy" but propagates it instead; and the fact that "the tiny energies of the nerves bear encoded information and are quantitatively negligible" (108–9). One of the most interesting points Holt makes concerns the inadequacy of Freud's drive-discharge theory in accounting for "enduring object-relations" (118). In a later, less guarded paper, Holt says that the theory of instincual drives "is so riddled with philosophical and factual errors and fallacies that nothing less than discarding the concept
of drive or instinct will do” (1976, 159). He proposes, in lieu of it, to focus on Freud’s concept of wish. In his paper on the psychoanalytic theory of motivation, Rubinstein proposes that the explanatory purpose of psychic energy can be taken over by the concept of information: “In current descriptions of nervous functioning the concept of information plays a much more prominent role than the concept of energy” (1967, 73). In G. S. Klein’s analysis of what he refers to as Freud’s two theories of sexuality (metapsychological and clinical), he denounces libido theory but does not make a clean break with Freud’s emphasis on the importance of sexuality. He regards it as more important than other sources of motivation. He writes, in particular, of “the unique conflict-inducing potential of sexual experience compared with other motivational sources” (1976, 114). Eagle remarks in this connection, “Klein believed he could separate libido theory from the general Freudian position regarding the centrality of sexuality in behavior, but, in fact, they are too intimately linked for that to be easily accomplished” (1984, 89).

The next four figures, all influenced by general systems theory, have in common a strong commitment to the perspectives of science. In his critique of libido theory, Bowlby claims that the model of psychical energy is unrelated, logically, to the concepts that psychoanalysts since Freud regard as central to psychoanalysis: “the role of unconscious mental processes, repression as a process actively keeping them unconscious, transference as a main determinant of behaviour; the origin of neurosis in childhood trauma” (1969, 16). What multiplies the power of Bowlby’s critique is the cogency of what he substitutes for drive theory, namely, attachment theory, a theory of object-relational behavior that he grounds on empirical data and elaborates on within a framework of general systems theory, especially the branch known as cybernetics. Independently and at about the same time Peterfreund (1971) reconceptualized virtually all aspects of psychoanalysis along similar lines, paying particular attention, among other things, to the deficiencies of Freud’s theory of psychic energy. Also at about the same time Rosenblatt and Thickstun (1970) published a critique of the concept of psychic energy, criticizing it, among other reasons, for its mind-body dualism and for its inability to explain the phenomenon of pleasurable tension. “It is our belief,” they conclude, “that the theory of psychic energy should be abandoned, and that the elements for substitute paradigms are now available” (272). In Modern Psychoanalytic Concepts in a General Psychology (1977) they elaborate those paradigms.
Breger’s critique of Freud’s theory of sexuality contends that the meta-psychology brings together “two powerful, conventional trends: the belief that theory should have a physicalist-mechanist form and the belief that sexuality is basically a harmful activity” (1981, 67). This contention is an extension of Breger’s thesis that sexuality gets treated within psychoanalytic theory in inconsistent ways, reflecting Freud’s “unfinished journey, the incomplete transition from a conventional to a critical world view” (51). Breger, who addresses the problems of Freud’s theory of sexuality as a whole as distinct from just libido theory, concludes that “a theory which attempts to explain so many human actions and feelings solely in terms of sexuality creates more problems than it solves” (65). The real question, of course, lies not in the degree of Freud’s reductionism, that is, the comparative economy of his explanation of so many things in terms of one principle; the more pressing question has to do with whether he latched onto the right explanatory principle in the first place.

One measure of the bankruptcy of Freudian drive theory may be taken in terms of the presumed efficacy of orthodox sexual (usually oedipal) interpretations in psychoanalysis. If Guntrip can bear witness, Winnicott’s empathic, person-oriented responses were far more helpful than Fairbairn’s detached, oedipal-libidinal interpretations (1975). At one point in the record he kept of his first training analysis, Guntrip wrote,

This is one of the points at which I now feel that Fairbairn’s constant reiteration of interpretations in terms of penises was a survival of classic Freudian sexology that his theory had moved beyond. I feel that kept me stationary, whereas interpretations in which mother did her best to restrict and dominate would have felt to me much more realistic. In effect, his analysis was a “penis-analysis,” not an “ego-analysis.” (in J. Hughes 1989, 111)

A rather similar instance of comparisons between the conventional sexual interpretations of one analyst and the person-oriented interpretations of another can be found in Margaret Little’s account of her treatment (1985), first and superficially with a Jungian, then from 1940–47 with Ella Freeman Sharpe, and finally for seven years with Winnicott. Little, who characterizes her anxieties as psychotic, pictures her analysis with Sharpe as one of constant struggle between them, Sharpe “insisting on interpreting what I said as due to intrapsychic conflict [having] to do with infantile sexuality, and I trying to convey to her that my real problems were matters of existence and identity” (15). Little continues: “I did not know what ‘myself’ was; sexuality (even if known) was totally irrele-
vant and meaningless unless existence and survival could be taken for granted, and personal identity established" (15). Little explains her dilemma this way: "Whenever I spoke of either of my parents, what I said was, for her, phantasy, and any reference to the realities was taking refuge from it. So I was doubly caught in the 'spider's web'; I was the crazy one, not my mother; she [Sharpe] was the one who 'knew,' as my mother, not I, had always known; while my recognition of my own and my mother's psychosis was dismissed as phantasy" (16). After an interim period with Marion Milner, Little began an analysis with Winnicott. He was able to provide a long-term, empathic environment that allowed Little to "work" at her own pace. He evidently succeeded in providing for Little the kind of potential space she required in order to become a person in her own right—with a corresponding relief from her psychotic anxieties. "In the words of an old friend from before analysis, I was 'not recognizable as the same person'" (37). While Little's experiences do not provide a perfectly clear-cut, uncomplicated illustration because of the presence of other issues, such as the differing developmental levels Sharpe and Winnicott chose to address, plus the fact that Little's work with Sharpe was by no means without object relational elements, certainly not without very early ones, Little's account may nevertheless be regarded as highlighting some of the differences between drive-oriented and person-oriented approaches. Extensive case material in chapters 3 and 4 will serve as further illustration of such differences.

Given the amount and seriousness of the criticism of drive theory in psychoanalysis, the comparative absence of significant countering responses, and the extent to which so many figures important in the history of object relations psychology have shifted toward a person-oriented position, the amount of profession-wide reluctance to give up drive theory is surprising. One instance can be located in the fence-straddling position, mentioned earlier, of Greenberg and Mitchell: their claim that we shall have to live with two incompatible theories of human behavior, one drive oriented and one person oriented. Late in their book—an extraordinarily valuable compendium of information about object relations theory remarkable for the degree of attentiveness, discrimination, and detachment they exhibit in describing, usually with great fidelity and thoroughness, the differing viewpoints at issue—they speak of the two object relational orientations as being based on incompatible but equally meaningful philosophical positions, one being that humans are inescapably individual creatures and the other that they are unavoidably social
creatures (1983, 403). Claiming further that "model mixing is unstable" (403), they argue that "it is neither useful nor appropriate to question whether either psychoanalytic model is 'right' or 'wrong.' Each is complex, elegant, and resilient enough to account for all phenomena" (404). They even go so far as to declare that "the evaluation of psychoanalytic theories is a matter of personal choice" (407)! Yet Greenberg and Mitchell appear to drop their stance of rhetorical neutrality at that point in the book where they associate themselves with Jacobson's position: "Jacobson's work overall constitutes what we consider the most satisfying drive/structure model theory after Freud's" (306; italics added). Here they seem to associate themselves with her position even though they recognize her accommodations to an object-relational view to be an instance of model mixing, a practice they elsewhere decry. If the position they adopt here constitutes a departure from their customary neutrality, perhaps it accounts for why they fail to do justice to the critiques of drive theory by Guntrip, G. S. Klein, Gill, Holt, and Schafer which they cite. One cannot, after all, take these critiques seriously while at the same time maintaining that explanatory parity exists between the drive-oriented and person-oriented positions. An alternative possibility is that the appearance of fence-straddling created by the pose of detached objectivity in Greenberg and Mitchell does not mask any lingering allegiance to drive theory but, on the contrary, disguises their unfettered commitment to more progressive views, views they may have avoided espousing directly as a way of circumventing the arousal of counter productive antagonism that might further polarize the opposing camps instead of encouraging a potentially productive exchange of ideas. Whatever his strategy in 1983, five years later Mitchell unequivocally endorses "a purely relational mode perspective, unmixed with drive-model premises" (1988, 54). He also says that work in preparation by Greenberg takes a similar position (135). It matters little whether the radical shift in their position was real or virtual; what I am calling attention to is the fact that in giving the appearance of countenancing drive-oriented object relations theory as still being intellectually respectable in 1983, the enormously influential, authoritative study of Greenberg and Mitchell may have had the effect of deterring rather than spurring a desirable evolution of views in the profession.

We have but to weed the garden of psychoanalysis of its stagnating, choking overgrowth, believes Edelson, for the distinctive contributions of psychoanalysis to emerge "sharp, clear, in bold relief" (xvi). For him this means giving primacy, among other things, to "the causal force of the quest for sexual pleasure over that of the quest for the object . . . and the causal force of sexual wishes over that of aggressive (and non-sexual) wishes" (xxi). Edelson believes the psychoanalytic theory of sexuality "to be in danger of dilution and displacement to the periphery by current preoccupation with 'the self,' 'identity,' 'object-relations,' 'interpersonal interactions,' 'the importance of the mother-infant relation and the pre-oedipal experiences of the very young infant,' and 'aggression'" (xxvii).

What he wants to do is to restore sexuality to the glory of its former centrality in psychoanalysis. He asks, "Do object-relations theories involve rather a redefinition of just what phenomena are of interest to psychoanalysis?" (224) He admits, "I don't know," yet that admission of ignorance does not deter him for a moment from asserting that "the inevitable slide away from the mind's workings to interpersonal interactions directly contradicts"—as far as he is concerned—"what is most distinctive about psychoanalysis" (225). If he believes "the slide" to be "inevitable," one wonders why Edelson insists on adopting the heroic posture of fighting fate by positioning himself directly in opposition to it. The point of mentioning Edelson's position on drive theory, one that many may find starkly reactionary, is that his viewpoint—that of a psychoanalyst of some eminence—is far from being unshared by others, and must be taken seriously, if only for the distinctness with which it describes a perspective currently in question.

The position espoused in this chapter, and further discussed in chapter 2, amounts very nearly to a mirror-opposite of the one defended by Edelson. It assumes that attachment behavior, which will be treated as a special branch of object relations behavior, is instinctive, like sexual behavior, at least in its beginnings. It further assumes that sexual behavior needs to be regarded, especially in terms of its potential for producing conflict, as intermingled with, but subordinate to, object-relations behavior. The concept of psychic energy has no place in this explanatory framework. Sexual behavior, whatever its degree of instinctiveness, reflects but one of many human needs whose priority at any given moment varies according to circumstances, that is, to the urgency of other priorities, but which over long periods of time does not ordinarily take precedence over the need of human beings for emotionally significant personal
attachments, including not only the initial and highly instinctive attachment of child to parent but also those taking the form of endless possible permutations of the primal one such as those we encounter in the form of fantasy in the realm of art. The problem of the relationship of self to other in this scheme of things constitutes a separate but related issue.