

SYNOPSIS OF AN OBJECT-RELATIONS THEORY OF THE PERSONALITY

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In response to many requests I have prepared the following brief synopsis of the theoretical views I have expounded over the last twenty years. (See bibliography.)

- (1) An ego is present from birth.
- (2) Libido is a function of the ego.
- (3) There is no death instinct; and aggression is a reaction to frustration or deprivation.
- (4) 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'.
- (5) The ego, and therefore libido, is fundamentally object-seeking.
- (6) The earliest and original form of anxiety, as experienced by the child, is separation-anxiety.
- (7) Internalization of the object is a defensive measure originally adopted by the child to deal with his original object (the mother and her breast) in so far as it is unsatisfying.
- (8) Internalization of the object is not just a product of a phantasy of incorporating the object orally, but is a distinct psychological process.
- (9) Two aspects of the internalized object, viz. its exciting and its frustrating aspects, are split off from the main core of the object and repressed by the ego.
- (10) Thus there come to be constituted two repressed internal objects, viz. the exciting (or libidinal) object and the rejecting (or antilibidinal) object.
- (11) The main core of the internalized object, which is not repressed, is described as the ideal object or ego-ideal.
- (12) Owing to the fact that the exciting (libidinal) and rejecting (anti-libidinal) objects are both cathected by the original ego, these objects carry into repression with them parts of the ego by which they are cathected, leaving the central core of the ego (central ego) unrepressed, but acting as the agent of repression.
- (13) The resulting internal situation is one in which the original ego is split into three egos—a central (conscious) ego attached to the ideal object (ego-ideal), a repressed libidinal ego attached to the exciting (or libidinal) object, and a repressed anti-libidinal ego attached to the rejecting (or antilibidinal) object.
- (14) This internal situation represents a basic schizoid position which is more fundamental than the depressive position described by Melanie Klein.
- (15) The antilibidinal ego, in virtue of its attachment to the rejecting (antilibidinal) object, adopts an uncompromisingly hostile attitude to the libidinal ego, and thus has the effect of powerfully reinforcing the repression of the libidinal ego by the central ego.
- (16) What Freud described as the 'superego' is really a complex structure comprising (a) the ideal object or ego-ideal, (b) the antilibidinal ego, and (c) the rejecting (or antilibidinal) object.
- (17) These considerations form the basis of a theory of the personality conceived in terms of object-relations, in contrast to one conceived in terms of instincts and their vicissitudes.

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W. R. D. Fairbairn (1963)

Synopsis of an Object-Relations Theory of the Personality.
International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 44 (Part 2), 224.