

5. Understanding resistance as self-protection and as related to the experience of the negative-repetitive dimension of the transference.
6. Attention to the leading edge of the patient's experience. This includes the patient's needs, strivings, expectations, and motivations for self-development and fulfillment.
7. Attention to the need for self-liberation from pathological enmeshment. (Sorter 1995)

## 8

## INTELLECTUAL AND SOCIOCULTURAL INFLUENCES ON KOHUT

**H**einz Kohut grew up in Vienna just after the turn of the twentieth century. He was born in 1913 at the start of World War I, the most widespread, devastating war in human history. Fittingly, he was born the same year Freud published his famous paper, "On Narcissism." Early twentieth-century Vienna was the intellectual center of Europe. It was then a place of intense intellectual ferment and creativity. Great intellectual innovation took place in many fields—in music, philosophy, economics, architecture, and, of course, psychoanalysis. In all of these fields, innovators broke their ties to the historical outlook that was central to the nineteenth-century liberal culture in which they had been reared (Schorske 1981[according to Library of Congress catalog]).

### HOW KOHUT WAS INFLUENCED BY THE GLORIFICATION OF PERSONAL SUBJECTIVITY

One of the intellectual currents of the time was the emphasis on—and sometimes glorification of—personal subjectivity. Carl Schorske, the intellectual historian of Vienna, says this was a time in which the

middle class became focused on the cultivation of the self and on personal happiness. In turn, this tendency led to a preoccupation with one's own psychic life. For example, the glorification of subjectivity was illustrated in the style used in the very popular cultural section of the press of that time, the "feuilleton." The feuilleton writer sought to embellish his material with color drawn from his imagination. His subjective response to his experience, his feeling-tone, took precedence over the discursive dimension of his discourse. To describe a feeling state became the mode of expressing a judgment (Schorske 1981).

As discussed, the emphasis on personal subjectivity is central to the vision of self psychology. Kohut viewed subjectivity as comprising the entire domain of inquiry for psychoanalysis. Self psychology views so-called external events as bearing meaning only as the patient experiences and organizes them (Orange 1995a). Kohut, strongly influenced by the philosopher Immanuel Kant, believed that the essence of reality was unknowable. The best we can do, he held, is to rely on the instruments of observation we have at our disposal: to apprehend the external world, we have our sensory organs; to apprehend the inner life, we rely on introspection and empathy.

### **HOW KOHUT WAS INFLUENCED BY THE SHIFT FROM THE LOGICAL-POSITIVIST EMPIRICIST MODEL TO THE POSTEMPIRICIST, POSTMODERN MODEL OF SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY**

A later intellectual current that strongly influenced Kohut was the shift from the logical-positivist/empiricist model for scientific inquiry to the postempiricist, postmodern model. Empiricists believe that the known is independent of the knower. The scientist is a rational onlooker who can observe events as they really are without influencing them. The inductive method and empiricist philosophy are grounded in the belief in "objectivity"—a term used by empiricists to mean an observer observing without bias, that is, being theory-neutral. Ac-

cording to postempiricist thought, there is no such thing as objectivity. A central tenet of postempiricist thought is that theory precedes observation. All observation is filtered through the lens of our theoretical preconceptions.

A second tenet of postempiricist thought is that there is no rock-solid anchor or basis upon which all knowledge can be built. Correspondence theories of truth—which hypothesize a match between things and the ideas that are thought to be copies of them—are rejected as naive. In contrast, postempiricists believe, "Truth is hermeneutic since it is a product of our understanding and interpretation, and so is not a 'given'" (Goldberg 1988: 15).

Therefore, a third tenet of postempiricist thought is that meanings are determined by theory and are understood by theoretical coherence rather than by correspondence with facts (Hesse 1980). It is not falsifiability but coherence of a theory and its ability to "best fit" experience that determines its usefulness, that is, whether it is better than another theory.

The postempiricist-subjectivist position is central to the philosophical basis of self psychology, as the empiricist-positivist-objectivist model was central to the philosophical basis of classical psychoanalysis. Freud had envisioned psychoanalysis as a science in the spirit of nineteenth-century positivism, modeled on biological neuroscience (Sulloway 1979). Freud believed in the empirical methodology of psychoanalysis. He thought that "the pure data" of the patient's associations could be examined in an uncontaminated form on the "blank screen" of the detached, anonymous scientist-analyst. By the correct application of this scientific procedure, the analyst could see the "facts" of the patient's dynamics, enabling him to formulate correct interpretations and formulate reliable theories (Orange 1995a).

Although Kohut spent many years as an adherent of the classical approach, he mainly shifted over time to a postempiricist position as he developed self psychological theory. In this vein, Kohut maintained: "An observer needs theories in order to observe" (1984: 67). Thus, Kohut thought that (1) theory precedes observation and (2) it is not possible to be a neutral, objective, unprejudiced observer of the external facts.

Another postempiricist belief that was quite influential for Kohut was of the inevitable influence of the observer on the observed. In physics, it had been asserted that in measuring a phenomenon, one affects it. This had come to be known as Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. In this new light, empiricist distinctions between observer and observed and between subject and object no longer made sense. Rather, the observer and observed are viewed as a unit that in certain respects is not divisible (Kohut 1977). In Kohut's own words, "Observer and observed are an unbreakable unit, and what we see can never be understood without including the observer and his tools of observation as an intrinsic part of the field that is being observed" (1980: 496).

Contextualism became a guiding philosophical supposition. No phenomenon, object, or person is a discrete, separate entity. Likewise, in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, Kohut and others came to appreciate that who and how the analyst is affects who and how the patient is—just as who and how the patient is affects the analyst in the same way. This contextualist, interdependent view informed Kohut's view of the self and of human relatedness. The self, Kohut maintained, cannot be meaningfully understood apart from its self-objects (i.e., others with whom one reliably has selfobject experience). The self is not a completely individuated, absolutely independent being functioning in emotional isolation (Lee and Martin 1991). Instead, the self is always in need of selfobject experience. More generally, how a person feels and functions is, in large part, dependent on both current and past experience of relatedness with significant others.

### **HOW KOHUT WAS INFLUENCED BY MODERN PHYSICS**

It is apparent from Kohut's writings that he was strongly influenced by modern physics. There are numerous analogies and metaphors in his writings drawn from physics. In fact, it seems possible that, as Berger (1987) conjectures, Kohut derived the configuration of the

self psychology model from one of the paradigms of modern physics, that of the atom. Kohut conceptualized the self, like an atom, as having a core. Again like the atom, the stability of the self is highly dependent on the surrounding field (of potential selfobject relatedness). As with atoms and molecules, the self exists in varying states of differentiation and lack of cohesion. In addition, an unstable self is intimately affected by its experience of the therapist, just as an unstable atom or molecule depends on the interaction of its nuclear particles with orbiting electrons. Selfobjects are not conceptualized as being contained within the self as much as coextensive with the self. Therefore, they occupy a territory very similar to the territory occupied by electrons in the structure of the atom. Just as electrons contribute to the characteristics of an atom and its nucleus, selfobjects contribute to the harmony, cohesion, and vitality of the nuclear self.

### **HOW KOHUT WAS INFLUENCED BY HIS CULTURAL INTERESTS**

Strongly developed cultural interests were another set of influences on Kohut that helped to shape his sensibility. Kohut received a classical European education and developed abiding interests in the arts, particularly music, as well as in philosophy, history, and literature. (In fact, Kohut wrote a number of papers about music from a psychoanalytic perspective early in his career. The idea that a musical note is meaningful only in context may have influenced his belief in the contextual perspective [Orange, personal communication].) In this vein, Kohut viewed psychoanalysis as belonging to the humanistic disciplines rather than being strictly a medical field. He thought Freud had erred in treating psychoanalysis as a science.

More speculatively, it seems likely that Kohut's emphasis on self-object relating and empathy, as necessary experiences for psychic survival and the self, may have arisen in part out of his exposure to the world wars, fascism, and the Holocaust. In 1938, when Kohut was a medical student in Vienna, Nazi Germany annexed Austria. The next year, Kohut left Vienna for the United States by way of

England, where he spent several months in a refugee camp awaiting the necessary papers that would permit him to migrate to the United States (Cocks 1994).

### KOHUT'S BACKGROUND IN PSYCHOANALYSIS

Kohut "grew up" analytically, so to speak, in the American ego psychology era of the late 1940s and early 1950s (ego psychology had germinated in Vienna in the 1930s, was transplanted via the war into England, and eventually took firm root in America [Mitchell and Black 1995]). He received his analytic training at the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis. These were years of great expansion and prestige for psychoanalysis in the United States. During this time, the numerous refugees from Europe and the American wartime need for psychological services had promoted unprecedented growth in the field (Cocks 1994). Characteristic of the time, Kohut adhered to the ego psychology tradition. Ego psychology emphasized the ego's autonomy from, and mediation between, internal drives and external environment. Adaptation and reality-testing were central concepts. With ego psychology came a shift in focus for psychoanalysis from interpreting incestuous impulses in the unconscious to exploring how the ego develops and functions both as self and as mediator and integrator.

Kohut quickly became a leading light at the Chicago Institute and not long after in American ego psychology-oriented psychoanalysis. He wrote numerous papers from this perspective, served on several committees of the American Psychoanalytic Association, and was elected president of the American Psychoanalytic Association. Thus, he was a leading figure of the psychoanalytic establishment of the time and sometimes was even referred to as "Mr. Psychoanalysis."

### KOHUT'S OBJECTIONS TO EGO PSYCHOLOGY

Despite his prominent place in the psychoanalytic establishment, Kohut became increasingly dissatisfied with classical analytic the-

ory and technique. First, in relation to a sizable group of his patients, those suffering with narcissistic pathology, he was dissatisfied with the understandings and results using classical theory. Second, he was concerned about the narrow requirements patients had to meet in order to be considered analyzable. Patients who did not respond to interpretations of oedipal conflict were considered unanalyzable. Most patients, it became clear, did not meet the criteria for analyzability. Thus, classical psychoanalysis found itself in the strange and difficult position of being unsuited for perhaps a majority of its potential clientele. Third, Kohut was concerned about the indiscriminate mixing in psychoanalytic formulations of psychological concepts with those from other disciplines. He dealt with this last concern in his 1959 paper, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis."

### KOHUT'S THESIS IN "INTROSPECTION, EMPATHY, AND PSYCHOANALYSIS"

Kohut's thesis was that the empathic-introspective mode of observation defines and delimits the domain of psychoanalytic inquiry. What Kohut means by "the empathic-introspective mode of observation" is the attempt to understand a person's expressions from a perspective within, rather than outside, that person's own subjective frame of reference (Stolorow, Brandchaft, and Atwood 1987).

Kohut (1959) observed that the investigation of the external, physical world with our sense organs is paralleled by the investigation of our inner world with the methods of introspection and empathy. In his words:

The inner world cannot be observed with the aid of our sensory organs. Our thoughts, wishes, feelings and fantasies cannot be seen, smelled, heard, or touched. They have no existence in physical space, and yet are real, and we can observe them as they occur in time: through introspection in ourselves, and through empathy (i.e., vicarious introspection) in others. (1959: 459)

We designate phenomena as psychological, Kohut says, when our mode of observation includes introspection and empathy as essential constituents. We may also make use of other elements of psychological observation such as free association. However, free association is a technique used in the service of the introspective-empathic mode of observation. Free association is a psychoanalytic technique that facilitates the emergence of psychoanalytic data. It is not a mode of observation. Empathy is the primary tool for "psychoanalytic fact-finding," Kohut argues.

When Kohut asserts that this observational mode defines and delimits the field of psychoanalysis, he means that only what is potentially accessible via introspection and empathy falls within the empirical and theoretical domain of psychoanalytic inquiry. An action or experience may be considered to be psychological only when it is observed via introspection and empathy.

Kohut objected strenuously to the mixing of concepts from different theoretical disciplines into psychoanalysis. He particularly inveighed against combining theories based on different modes of observation. He was most concerned about intermingling the concepts of psychology based upon data drawn from introspection and empathy with the theories of biology and sociology based on observations of the external world. He notes as an example that Freud's concepts of Eros and Thanatos do not belong to a psychological theory grounded on the observational methods of introspection and empathy but to a biological theory that must be based on different observational methods. The concepts of Eros and Thanatos lie outside the framework of psychoanalytic psychology.

Kohut took particular issue with what he called the "biologizing of psychology." Drives, he pointed out, are biological concepts and thus not part of introspectively arrived-at psychoanalytic theories. The psychoanalytic method does not allow us to say anything about the nature of the drive as a biological entity; only its introspected aspects are on the psychological level and can be the subject of psychoanalysis. Thus, as psychoanalysts we can know about wishes and the experience of feeling driven by them but not about the drives themselves (P. Ornstein 1978).

## THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE CONTROVERSY ABOUT PSYCHOANALYTIC EPISTEMOLOGY

Kohut probably was well aware of the historical background of this controversy about the nature of psychological knowledge. William Dilthey, a renowned German philosopher, had suggested in 1894 that the natural sciences and the psychological sciences differed from one another in their methods. In the natural sciences, the data observed can be explained, while in the psychological sciences the data can only be understood. The former is a science of explanation, the latter a science of understanding.

Dilthey characterized explanation as the result of an observer's intellectual analysis of the data; explanations pertain to the causal connections of the natural sciences. Psychological understanding, on the other hand, is attained through the exercise of empathy, and empathy entails, in his view, an appreciation of all the data. Therefore, psychology is able to generate descriptive formulations but cannot generate meaningful theories about the causes of psychological disorders (Berger 1987). Kohut and subsequent self psychologists have followed Dilthey in the conviction that the methods of observation of the natural sciences differ from those of psychology, and in their belief that empathy is the primary receiving and organizing instrument in psychological science.

Heinz Hartmann (1927), the noted ego psychologist, disagreed with Dilthey's position. Hartmann asserted that Freud's discoveries had, in fact, made it possible to explain a patient's symptoms and personality dynamics. The discoveries of psychoanalysis, he maintained, had eliminated any differences between psychology and the natural sciences.

Kohut disputed the epistemological position of Freud and Hartmann. In spelling out his position on psychoanalytic epistemology, Kohut moved a long way "toward reframing psychoanalysis as an autonomous science of human experience, a depth psychology of human subjectivity" (Atwood and Stolorow 1984). Kohut viewed human subjectivity as the entire domain of psychoanalytic inquiry.

Subsequently, several other prominent psychoanalytic theorists such as Guntrip (1968), Gill (1976), Klein (1976), Schafer (1976), and Atwood and Stolorow (1984) have joined Kohut's effort "to free the phenomenological insights of clinical psychoanalysis from the Procrustean bed of materialism, determinism, and mechanism that was the heritage of Freud's immersion in nineteenth-century biology" (Stolorow, Brandchaft, and Atwood 1987: 16).

## 9

## INTERSUBJECTIVITY

I am including a brief overview of intersubjectivity theory because self psychology and intersubjectivity theory have developed in tandem and have had a considerable influence on one another. Indeed, the two theories have cross-fertilized one another from the late 1970s to the present.

The term *intersubjectivity* has become a popular one in the past twenty years and is used in varied ways by different theorists such as Jessica Benjamin, Thomas Ogden, Daniel Stern, and Colin Trevarthen. In this section I will be referring only to the intersubjectivity theory of Robert Stolorow, George Atwood, and their colleagues, Bernard Brandchaft and Donna Orange.

### HOW INTERSUBJECTIVITY THEORY EVOLVED

Stolorow reports he first became interested in the study of subjectivity while doing his graduate work at Harvard University. There, under the mentorship of Henry Murray, Stolorow was strongly influenced by Murray's personology theory. Its basic tenet is the assertion that knowledge of human personality can progress only by