Modern Ego Psychology
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MODERN EGO PSYCHOLOGY

This paper reviews the history of ego psychology, describing problems in the theory that have perhaps contributed to subsequent theory development and theoretical splintering. The present status of ego psychology is then described, with a focus on broadly accepted general principles. A proposal/prediction is then made regarding efforts to integrate the main schools and splinter groups. It is argued that the ego's method of synthesizing aspects of experience will help integrate divergent metapsychological viewpoints.

In this paper I will describe the history of ego psychology, review its status today, and look at its possible future development. It should be understood that my point of view will inevitably shape my survey of the field. This personal slant is inevitable when writing an overview of a field as broad and varied as ego psychology. Because even basic concepts in this area are often ambiguous and disputed, disagreements are inevitable. I hope, however, to point accurately to the general issues and to our commonalities. I will try to describe what most ego psychologists would agree is basic and will thereby attempt to achieve a defining consensus (which others may find dubious). I do feel that some consensus can be achieved and that it is necessary for the future development of our theory.

AN ANNOTATED HISTORY OF EGO PSYCHOLOGY

It may be helpful in reviewing the present and future status of ego psychology to understand its history. A mere recitation of facts and dates is seldom enlightening, yet an interpretive history is inevitably speculative. Nonetheless, I will attempt an annotated history in order

to show the development of ego psychology based on problems of theory that might have spawned the birth of various movements within ego psychology (Rapaport 1959; Richards and Lynch 1998). Such a history might help us better understand the growth requirements and developmental potential of modern ego psychology.

When Freud wrote "The Ego and the Id" (1923), he changed the meaning of ego from self "as a whole, perhaps including the body," to a set of related mental functions, "a part of the mind". He thus gave birth to ego psychology, which was from its inception a study of mental functioning (Laplanche and Pontalis 1967). The ego became the term used for aspects of mental functioning that regulate and mediate between the experience of reality and the experience of the person. (Campbell 1989). A description of mental functioning focused at that time on collections of like functions called agencies and the conflicts between them (Moore and Fine 1990). Conflict was intrapsychic and occurred between some combination of the agencies ego, id, and superego. No longer was conflict viewed as occurring simply between the self as a whole and social morality or material reality; nor did it occur just between conscious and unconscious, or id and ego. This shift was needed to account for Freud's observation of unconscious ego phenomena (1917,1921), unconscious superego phenomena, and the role of identifications with external objects in building internal superego and ego content and structure.

Anna Freud (1936) refocused descriptive theory on the defenses, so important in clinical work, lest the concept get lost or diluted in the new tripartite structural theory, in which repression was no longer the only defense. By describing specific defense mechanisms in the preconscious and unconscious and attributing them to the ego, she brought the defense concept into line with the new theory.

At the same time, Waelder (1936) noted the multidetermined nature of symptoms, referring to the role of all three agencies in their formation. Waelder was expanding on the elder Freud's notion of "overdetermined" symptoms, an idea that referred only to condensed unconscious dynamics. Waelder thereby translated a topographic term into one with relevance to the tripartite structure.

From this point ego psychology gradually diverged into those who follow Anna Freud literally and focus psychoanalytic technique mainly or solely on defenses (Gray 1994), and those who follow Waelder literally and focus always and only on the multidetermined

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nature of symptoms and all mental content. The leading proponents of the latter approach have been Arlow and Brenner (1964), especially Brenner (1982).

Arlow and Brenner made an important contribution: they applied Waelder's idea to the explication of Freud's concept of compromise formation, but with emphasis on conflict in the tripartite structure of symptoms. They brought therapeutic technique into clearer focus and greater balance by interpreting all conflict elements of the compromise formation. Because compromise formation is a clinical concept, it allowed a better fit between clinical theory and metapsychology at the level of tripartite agency function.

Arlow and Brenner's concentration on the level of agency elements of compromise formation was perhaps also a reaction to the excesses of drive theory. The unifocal drive concept had reduced even complicated clinical phenomena like character to phases of drive development alone (Freud 1908; Abraham 1924). Drive theory tended to ignore the structure of ego and superego as independent and determining variables. By diminishing reality, trauma, adaptation, defenses, identification, and superego as independent variables, it became a mere splinter of psychoanalytic theory. (For a summary of drive theory, see Compton 1983; see also Peskin 1997.)

The power and appeal of Arlow and Brenner's approach was so great that compromise formation theory swept American ego psychology. It did so in part because it was far easier to comprehend than the approaches of Hartmann, Jacobson, Schafer, or Loewald and seemed closer to clinical phenomena. By the 1970s it was dominant. In fact, it captured the term "American ego psychology," which became synonymous with conflict and compromise.

But at the time that Anna Freud and Waelder were first advancing their theories, Hartmann (1938) was also writing. He recognized another aspect of ego functioning, certain conscious and unconscious neurocognitive capacities he called apparatuses, such as memory, vision, and secondary process logic. He described how they developed as functions and how they operated in relative autonomy from dynamic conflict. This concept enabled him to look at the ego's adaptation to reality, a concept that was deemphasized when Freud turned from the seduction theory to conflict theory and from the topographic to the structural model. Reality and real relationships regained their importance when Freud described the processes of identification. But identification was

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a dynamic, conflictual, unconscious emotional process, id-driven, though with profound effect on agency development, particularly that of the ego. Hartmann was determined to describe all neuromental development and to expand psychoanalysis into a general psychology, a goal once sought by Freud as well.

But Hartmann, preserving the concept of drive energy, underplayed dynamics and object relations and their relation to ego development and ego function. Because Hartmann focused mainly on functions, apparatuses, cathexes, and adaptation, his concept of the ego became more complicated and mechanical and less psychodynamic and clinical. Thus, Hartmann's attempt at a general psychology splintered away from clinical work and the psychoanalytic process.

Hartmann's ideas were pursued along two broad fronts. The first was severe psychopathology and its relation to descriptive theory. Rapaport (1967), a careful and scholarly thinker, attempted to systematize and elaborate ego psychology. His primary interest was in the mental function of thinking, in both healthier and very ill psychiatric patients. He taught and inspired later ego psychologists like Schafer and Gill. Bellak et al. (1973), interested in schizophrenic patients, conducted pioneering studies that set out to more accurately define and describe ego dysfunction. This ego psychological approach was applied to a definition of psychotic and near-psychotic structure and formed the basis for a description of a combined regimen of analysis and medication (Marcus 1992, in press).

Vaillant (1993) applied the ego strength concept epidemiologically by prospectively investigating normal growth and development of ego processes in late adolescence and throughout adulthood. His groundbreaking work established the lifelong developmental significance of ego defenses, ego resilience, and ego integrative processes.

The other broad front along which Hartmann's ideas were pursued was child observation, which he encouraged as a means of grounding ego development theory in scientific observations of ego growth. Mahler (1968) studied abnormal children and did for object relations and ego structures what Freud had done for the id—described crucial developmental phases that were inborn and inevitable. She looked at the effects of separation-individuation on ego development in the mother-child relationship (McDevitt 1979). In a similar vein, Weil (1970) contributed seminal papers on early ego endowment, growth, and development. Stern (1985) has continued Mahler's work but broadened

it to look at the development of the whole person or self. This has demanded creative contributions to scientific infant observation and to descriptive theory, because Stern focuses on the earliest sentient representational forerunners of self and other in the mother-child relationship before infant language develops (see Beebe 1986). Tyson and Tyson (1990) have reviewed modern developmental ego psychology from the standpoint of child development research. In a beautifully elaborated book, they demonstrate the development of object relations and its relation to the growth of ego and superego structure, describing developmental interactions, bidirectional influences, and integrations. They cite careful developmental research by the group at Yale under the direction of Emde (1988).

All psychoanalytic research groups, of course, are indebted to the pioneering child observation research at the Hampstead Clinic under Anna Freud and Joseph Sandler. Sandler defined many of the terms of ego psychology and object relations in more specific ways. Today many of the most advanced, integrative, and clinically sophisticated modern ego psychologists, e.g., Greenspan (1989), are child analysts and researchers.

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Jacobson (1954, 1964) attempted to integrate object relations with ego psychology because the Freudian view of ego development includes identification with objects, not just drive derivatives. Jacobson understood the complex interdependence of the development of object relations with ego and superego development, in contrast to the Kleinian emphasis on the id. Unlike Fairbairn, Jacobson sought to preserve the traditional Freudian structural model. She described ego and superego development in relation to the development of internalized object relations and in the interplay with ego maturation of processes like endowment, drive neutralization, integration, and other executive functions of the ego. But because she retained the concept of drive cathexes, her theory was, like Hartmann's, quite complicated.

Loewald, Sandler, and Schafer, working separately, also expanded and elaborated the various relationships between structural theory and object relations theory. Loewald viewed psychic structure as "an open systems model viewing all psychic structures, including even instinctual drives, as structuralized through mother-infant interactions" (Tyson in Fogel et al. 1996; see also Fogel 1991). Schafer (1968) described an exact relationship between object relations and structure: he located the experience of object relations as a whole in the ego and described

object relations as composed of id, ego, and superego structural elements. He also precisely defined internalization processes—introjection, incorporation, and identification—as processes that mediate psychic structure, reality, and aspects of object relations. He took account of maturational processes of autonomous ego functions, thereby including Hartmann, and clarified the relationship between psychological, psychodynamic, and neurological processes. He also redefined motivation in modern ego psychology terms. This meant a shift from drive to what Schafer called motive, a broader term, including ego motives as well as those of the superego. These motives include the motivating power of object relations and compromise formations, as well as mastery motives of the exercise of ego function. Motive thus became a complex term, at times superordinate but in any case organized by the ego. (For a recent view of motive, see Westen 1997.) Thus, Schafer brought dynamics back to Hartmann's ego while also contributing a more specific description of ego processes and functions. He thereby significantly advanced modern ego psychology.

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Kernberg (1975) applied Kleinian mechanisms to ego psychology in his intrapsychic descriptions of borderline and narcissistic patients. He described the dynamic object relations content and structure of their primitive defenses, which are crucial mediators of ego dysfunction in sicker patients. Kernberg demonstrated a relationship between ego and superego structures and object relations when he described the structure of narcissistic grandiosity in combined object relations–agency structure terms. Profoundly influenced by Fairbairn, Jacobson, and Sutherland, as well as by Klein, Kernberg considered object relations the basic building blocks of the tripartite structure. This conception also rests on work by Loewald (1980) and Schafer (1968). (See also Rangell 1985.)

Affect, defense, and primary process phenomenology are all well preserved in object relations theory, which is clinically relevant in an immediate and emotionally gripping way. It also describes preoedipal dynamics, an area neglected by compromise theory and so important both in development and in clinical work. As a result, object relations gained in popularity in the seventies and early eighties. Indeed, by the mid-eighties, it seemed to be the dominant form of American ego psychology.

Meanwhile, Arlow was elaborating the concept of unconscious fantasy, first introduced by Freud, and extended by Klein. Arlow made the concept of fantasy applicable to the multidetermined and over-

determined structural theory and left the rest of Klein behind. His concept of fantasy included both a tripartite structure and object relations, both reality and drive, but without any explicit specification. He situated his fantasy concept at the level of psychodynamics and psychogenetics and thereby avoided metapsychology. In this he also was probably reacting against the energic and structural complexity of Hartmann and Jacobson.

The reaction against complex theory and metapsychology continued. Lacan, Schafer, Spence, and other hermeneuticists reduced all metapsychology to language and meaning. Abandoning tripartite structure, they reduced all object relations and ego structure to dynamic meaning and declared all meanings equal. Now that evidence was in the here and now, now that the unconscious was language (Lacan), even a text could be regarded as a patient. Lacan's metapsychology and Schafer's action language, however, required that adepts learn new vocabularies and did not ultimately themselves avoid complexity.

Ego psychologists have serious doubts about whether such an approach can ever apply to clinical work with real patients who have real illnesses, specific structures mediating those illnesses, and specific histories. One meaning or interpretation is not the same as any other. The clinical concept of the case is specifically grounded by illness and symptom concepts that limit the otherwise infinite regress of dynamic interpretations and of clinically useful meaning. Ego psychologists also challenge the notion that the unconscious is structured like a language. Rather, the unconscious, characterized by primary process and thing presentations, operates in visual and somatosensory modes. Language, by contrast, relies heavily on secondary process and word presentations, and is logico-conceptual in form.

Clinical psychoanalysis in America then moved on to the intersubjective, to the interpersonal, and to self psychology in an attempt to place these aspects of meaning back into theory and back into the clinic.

The interpersonal view, combined with transference and countertransference technique, has led to the intersubjective view (see Stolorow, Atwood, and Brandchaft 1994). This perspective focuses on the mutual emotional influence of analyst and patient. Meaning now occurs between patient and analyst; it is mutually valid and bidirectional. This approach was catalyzed by Gill's focus on transference (1982), the hermeneutic focus on meaning, Sullivan's

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interpersonal approach (1953), and Kohut's focus on empathy and self (1971).

Ego psychology has needed some corrective in the areas of empathic meaning and subjectivity but is wary of totally abandoning an objective analytic stance, lest crucial concepts based on objectivity be lost—e.g., the concepts of illness, of symptoms, and of external reality as developmental catalyst, traumatizer, and organizer. Gabbard (1997) warns about the "limitations of privileging the patient's subjectivity."

All of these approaches—the intersubjective, the interpersonal, self psychology, and the recent emphasis on countertransference—owe their theoretical basis not only to Sullivan (1953) but also to British object relations theory, particularly the Middle Group. Fairbairn (1952) described object seeking and object-related structural organizations. Winnicott (1965) described the mother-child relationship, its crucial influence, and the need for technique to provide new empathic (holding) experiences after a regression to the fixation point of deprivation. Racker (1968) described the countertransference relationship between patient and analyst, and their mutual influence. The American interpersonal school started with Sullivan (1953) but gained in power when it became mixed with object relations ideas (Greenberg and Mitchell 1983).

These theories are all theories of technique and can at most be regarded as only partial theories of mind. Even as theories of technique they are limited, in that they address a wide range of patient problems and illnesses with but one technical approach. They cannot be comprehensive theories of technique because they have no comprehensive theory of mind. Hence, they may distort technique by limiting its focus. In this sense, they are all splinter theories. Nonetheless, these four approaches attempt to "fill in" aspects of technique and psychoanalytic experience that the American ego psychology of conflict and compromise tended to overlook or downplay, and that object relations theories highlighted but diffused.

These splinter theories were also building on self psychology, which years before had diverged from American ego psychology. Kohut (1971) felt that the structural theory deemphasized empathic connection to patients' affective experiences and need for empathic attunement in treatment. His approach therefore focused on empathy with affect and on the positive meaning of symptoms and compromises.

He focused especially on self-esteem. His technique is a mirroring technique, actualizing the self-object mirror transference.

Closely aligned with self psychology are the deficit theorists, who criticize conflict theory for ignoring reality-based emotional deprivation or for seeing it as a secondary phenomenon. Deficit theorists brought back a focus on emotional deprivation and resulting emotional deficit, often at preoedipal levels. These preoedipal issues require particular empathic attunement by the analyst.

When deficit theoreticians and clinicians have sought to add their point of view, they have been very helpful. When they seek to replace all theory with this viewpoint, however, they commit the same exclusionist crime against which they have rebelled. For instance, in their exclusive focus on deficits caused by deprivation or trauma, they often ignore those related to illness, poor endowment, and maturational factors.

THEORETICAL OBSTACLES TO THE INTEGRATION OF EGO PSYCHOLOGY

The many strands of psychoanalytic theory today can plausibly be reduced to three major tendencies. Although their proponents conceptualize them as separate from each other, aspects of each are compatible within a broad ego psychology. These three tendencies are the structural / compromise formation theory, object relations theory, and self psychology (or at least certain aspects of it). The first two include a drive concept. While I do not regard self psychology as itself a branch of ego psychology (its proponents certainly do not), it does raise certain crucial issues that modern ego psychology must address. The interpersonal view may be regarded as a subdivision of object relations theory, and the intersubjective view as a subdivision of self psychology. The main obstacle to integrating the major strands into a unified ego psychology is the element of excess in each.

There are many problems of excess in the structural compromise/ conflict theory. Although it claims to be a description of all psychoanalytically relevant mental functioning, in fact it diminishes in importance many crucial aspects of mental life. It downplays adult autonomous ego function, as well as early preoedipal experience and structure. It ignores the particular nature of preoedipal drive development, the formative importance of preoedipal attachment needs, the

early forerunners of superego development, and the early defensive and cognitive functions of the ego. These problems become most salient when one element of the compromise is determinant. Examples are highly traumatic or depriving reality factors; impaired ego function due to psychiatric illness or endowment; intensified drive, as seen in mood disorders; or rigid and unyielding defensive structures, as in some types of severe character disorder.

Most important, compromise theory acknowledged primary process only in its energy distribution aspect (Arlow and Brenner 1964). But primary process refers also to a symbolic form that encodes the qualities and intensities of affect. The compromise formation concept tends to a mechanistic reductionism that overlooks this form and the affective experience it affords the ego. One casualty of the compromise approach to primary process has been the special role played in psychoanalytic work by the dream function and attendant affective experience.

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In an attempt to recapture affect and the clinical moment, compromise formation theory has of late focused increasingly on psychodynamics. Brenner (1994), taking this to an extreme, reduces all macrostructures to the microstructures of psychodynamics, thereby eliminating the concept of agencies. Most ego psychologists, however, continue to find agency descriptions useful in identifying clusters of compromise formations characteristic of crucial groups of functions— e.g., ego or superego functioning (Boesky 1994). Agency terms are also needed for functions and processes that are crucial organizing aspects of psychodynamics and compromises. Agency descriptions operate at a level of conceptualization different from that of psychodynamic terms; both levels are needed.

Object relations theory likewise has its excesses. Klein splintered her theory from the broader body of psychoanalytic thought by claiming that all object relations arise in response to the drives, that all structure is object relations, that most development occurs in the first six months of life, that all pathological motivation is aggression, and that all aggression is inborn and none of it reactive. To this day, object relations theories tend to focus on aggression and one of its derivatives, envy. Object relations theories tend to downplay ego functions and structures. The ego aspects of symptoms and of object relations are not well articulated. Ignored is how the autonomous ego organizes object relations (Marcus 1992, in press). Without the inclusion of ego aspects in

descriptive theory, object relations may become but a manifestation of the drives or of the interpersonal—e.g., reality trauma, reality deprivation (Greenberg and Mitchell 1983). Without a modern ego psychological view of the complex structure of the ego, object relations theory cannot integrate the use of medication into its technical approach. That is problematic for a theory that focuses particularly on sicker patients.

Both compromise formation and object relations have problems with the level of organization called self or person. Jacobson, and Kernberg after her, described the self as the sum of the self-representations. Similarly, Brenner might point to the sum of the compromise formations. In either case, the whole self is the sum of its parts. For Winnicott, by contrast, the self was greater than the sum of its parts; it existed at a different level of conceptualization, a higher level of organization. Winnicott described the self and its development directly and at its own level. Erikson (1950) agreed with this approach. The level of ego identity he described was far more inclusive than the idea of ego as agency. Erikson's concept was a developmental thematic approach to the description of the self. Winnicott clinically, and Stern experimentally, show that this level of organization develops from birth; the rudiments of temperament and self-function are present from the beginning. Kohut elaborated these principles into self psychology, which deals analytically almost exclusively with this level of personality organization.

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But self psychology is without the elaborated structure provided by the tripartite model. It is also without an elaborated theory of object relations, other than those related to self-esteem regulation. Kohut thus jettisoned most of structural description, including the internal conflict generated by drive intensity, inborn endowment factors in relation to ego functions (both integrative and defensive), and the role of aggression in normal superego development. Kohut viewed neurotic structural malformations as the result of deficits in parental empathy. He thereby gave up the tripartite model and the concept of agency conflict, developing instead his own abbreviated bipolar structural model of self-esteem regulation. Thus did self psychology became a splinter theory.

EGO PSYCHOLOGY TODAY

Ego psychology is at present in a phase of extreme splintering, as various aspects of theory split off from the main body of thought to elaborate only their own special concerns. But the main theory may

for a period of time become itself so complexly and internally elaborated that it fails to progress. It may, in addition, fail to relate to clinical psychoanalysis. When that happens, as seems to have occurred in modern ego psychology, the field is reduced to a collection of splinter groups, each claiming to be the crucial aspect of psychoanalytic work.

This splintering of theory into smaller and smaller fragments, and attempts to rebuild from the point of view of each splinter, mark a predictable phase in scientific development. Typical of this phase is argument, as each model pits itself against the others. Find the faults, not the fit. Arguments become tendentious and stalemated, because each position has some validity but is advanced from a different vantage point and a different level of conceptualization.

A splinter theory can never be all-inclusive, because it is designed precisely as a rebellion against a major theory that has left out or minimized the concern of the splinter theory. But by its aggressive, exclusionary focus such splintering tends to provoke a counterattack. In addition, splinter groups tend to elaborate their theory beyond its capacity, as they find themselves as prone to the seductions of theory as those against whom they initially rebelled.

There are three seductions, in particular, to which theory is prone. The first is grandiosity. This is seen when a theory at one level claims to describe and explain all levels. The second, a related phenomenon, is reductionism. This shows itself when a theory at one level claims that other levels don't exist or do so only as epiphenomena. The third seduction is that of theory determinism. Here conclusions are imposed by the theory's requirement for consistency, regardless of data.

There is another seductive problem with theory, especially splinters. People identify themselves with their theories. They have followers and exercise ideological and political power both within their institutes and within the field (Richards 1995). Ideopolitical social systems can arise in any field of endeavor, but ours may be particularly prone to this development. Our theoretical immaturity as a field, the complexity of our data, and the fact that quite different therapeutic approaches can be successful make objective comparison and the validation of theories and techniques a difficult task indeed.

There are, however, basic principles and levels of description that most ego psychologists agree on even while awaiting a comprehensive ego psychological model. Almost all ego psychologies include a

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developmental concept. The mind grows and, as it does, its elements increase in function, in content, and in relations with each other. Most ego psychologies also have an elaborated concept of structure in which relatively stable contents and processes are delineated, with organized and stable relations at different levels of dynamic organization, from micro to macro.

Most ego psychologies include as a subheading of structure the dynamic components of affects, drives, and object relations. These dynamic organizations of structure have economic power in mental experience and in mental structures. These dynamic, economic aspects help determine the compromise. Affect has drivelike properties, one of which is motivational force. Structure, etiology, function, and dynamics are all related but different.

Object relations organize elements of drive, ego, and superego in representations. Object relations reflect both inborn and experiential factors, both maturational and developmental. Object representations contain conflict and are both condensed mnemic representations and symbolic fantasy representations.

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Ego psychology today accepts the deficit concept. Deficits caused by trauma, deprivation, inborn ego problems, and illness are all recognized as aspects of the contents and organizations of agency structure, of object relations, and of conflict and compromise.

The adaptational processes of the ego are now also generally accepted. Adaptation to reality experience and to emotional experience is one of the mediating tasks of the ego. The concept of ego integration processes is likewise accepted universally, implicitly or explicitly, as a crucial aspect of the clinical description of patients. Ego integrative processes function at different levels of consciousness and with different levels of organization. Object relations, compromise formations, and self are all synthetic organizations. It is the ego especially that organizes and mediates compromises, integrating each individual's unique psychic reality. Hence the name ego psychology.

Ego psychologists use the conceptual level of self or personality constantly when discussing clinical work with patients. We accept and describe different personality types. Ego psychology does not, however, have a well-articulated metapsychology of personality. Ego psychologists have tended to subsume a broad notion of personality under the narrow rubric of character defenses. An expanded view is Erikson's concept of identity (1950), or Lidz's concept of the person

(1983), demonstrating that this level can have a comfortable home in ego psychology.

Do we have commonalities of technique? Modern ego psychology has at its disposal a flexible technique involving various levels and approaches at various times with various patients. With any one patient the analyst will at different times focus on defense, affect, compromise, object relations, or self experience. At times the work will involve the here and now of transference and countertransference; at others it will involve psychogenetics. This will depend on the actual unfolding of the analysis and on the specific symptoms and illness of each patient. This was the technique of Anna Freud as reported by Couch (1995).

The technique of modern ego psychology also varies according to the structure of the patient's ego. Technique requires careful diagnostic assessment of ego functions, especially those affecting the psychoanalytic process. Examples of ego functions affecting technique in neurotic patients are ability to shift levels of abstraction, synthesizing ability, flexibility of defense, and level of affect validity. These will determine the ego's ability to use a particular level of interpretation, the degree of affect energizing the transference and countertransference, when (if ever) various types of interpretation are useful, and the pace of the psychoanalytic process.

A renewed interest in ego defense in neurotic patients was catalyzed by Gray's work on defense resistance in psychoanalytic treatment (1994). Gray describes a technique that focuses solely on this aspect of psychoanalytic work. Busch (1995, 1996), expanding on Gray, identifies the ego as the vehicle of treatment. Busch's technique is aimed specifically at mobilizing the ego in treatment. He seeks to increase the development of ego functions, especially the self-analyzing function. Similarly, Holmes (1996) writes about strengthening the ego by focusing on resistances to autonomous ego functions. Marcus (1992, in press) makes this a basis for technique with very ill patients.

Techniques that focus on only one aspect of ego function, such as Gray's or Busch's focus on defense resistance, seek to enter other levels of mental experience in terms of and from the level they focus on. This can work well with patients whose symptoms are organized or who have illnesses affecting primarily that level. Higher functioning, more organized defense neuroses may yield their most important neurotic symptoms and character defenses to defense analysis technique. This is

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because it is the defense level of the ego that is organizing the illness; that level is where affect validity finds its clearest and most meaningful symptomatic expression. Any ego psychologist would tend to focus on that level with such patients. But there are patients for whom, and phases of analysis for which, that level will not suffice. Other aspects of ego psychological theory and a more flexible technique are then required.

In summary, although ego psychologists may at times sound like a veritable babel, I believe we have what Herbert Schlesinger calls a "rough collection" of ego psychology paradigms. These include Freud's structural theory, Anna Freud's defense analysis, Arlow and Brenner's concepts of conflict, compromise formation, and unconscious fantasy, Hartmann's ego psychology, Jacobson's and Kernberg's object relations, and some concept of person or self. Some topographical and economic concept is also included. The next step is to determine how these are to be integrated.

THE FUTURE OF EGO PSYCHOLOGY

The next phase of ego psychology's development will be a vigorous and intense period of integration. At the turn of the century, modern ego psychology seeks a holistic theory of mind, a scientific general psychology dealing with all aspects of mental function, allowing for scientific strategies of data collection and having the broadest application to technique in varying illness states.

Integration phases begin when splintering progresses to the point at which each partial theory, having attempted to address its deficiencies, begins to overlap with its rivals. Confusion ensues, as the schools approach common problems from different vantage points and with different vocabularies. But inevitably, eventually, when people come to realize that they are talking about the same problems and phenomena, active integration can proceed.

We are beginning to see this in the growing overlap of structural theory and object relations thought. A recent example is the work of LaFarge (1995), who describes the defensive splitting of objects based on aspects of mental functioning other than the Kleinian splitting of love and hate, positive and negative valence. She discusses the separation of two aspects of the self in experience, describing two quite different ego attitudinal aspects, each a complex and integrated whole. This is the ego psychology concept of dissociation. Once the dissociation concept

enters object relations theory, its descriptions of conflicts can be more complex, individualized, multifaceted, and layered. This layering is more characteristic of structural theory. Thus, LaFarge achieves structural complexity while retaining the affect-rich descriptions characteristic of object relations thought. In addition, her clinical work describes the psychogenetics of childhood identifications, as well as the drive intensity factor. (For other recent integrations, see Schwaber 1998; Feinsilver 1999.)

Ego psychology is the psychoanalytic theory most able to integrate divergent views because it is a broad general psychology with many vantage points, levels of abstraction, and levels of description. It will do so more easily and rapidly if we recognize that different clinical perspectives correlate with levels of organization of the ego and its states. Object relations and self-integration, for example, are two different levels of ego organization. These ego levels are related by synthesizing processes that integrate them. Thus, ego psychology can be unified in the same way that mental life integrates its different levels, functions, and contents—through observation and description of the ego's synthesizing capacity. Ego psychology offers the most comprehensive description of integration and of synthesizing functions. Although it recognizes a great variety of synthesizing mental contents and experiences, organization is accomplished by means of three general processes.

The first is what Freud called the secondary process. This process gathers data and assembles information based on perception and consciously applied Aristotelian logic, according to learned schemes and inductive and deductive reasoning. Data and ideas tend to form groups of well-boundaried categories congruent with spatiotemporal experience. Data groups and their concepts are the main organizer. Secondary process matures together with the central nervous system and cognitive skills (Piaget 1977). Secondary process grows also with the environmental influence that we call experience or education.

A second means of organization is the primary process. This is an analog information-processing system that deals especially with affect (Freud 1900; Plutchik 1980; Bucci 1997). Here affect intensities, qualities, and domains form an organizing matrix for contents and categories. Primary process synthesizes complexity by means of condensation, thereby producing symbolic representations composed of many lines of affect associations in a special modality that Freud called *thing presentations*.

Freud (1915) used the term *object presentation* to refer to the central nervous system's encoding of mental representation. He believed the object presentation had two components: a verbal component, or *word presentation,* and a visual component, the *thing presentation.* Words are capable of rendering concepts and abstraction directly. Thing presentations do so through the somatosensory medium of physical objects, often visually presented. They are symbolic affect representations in perceptual form. Percept-affect condensations are used as metaphors to express emotionally meaningful concepts. This transmodal processing allows concepts to take into account analog processes like affects, with their various qualities and infinite gradations of intensity. Intensity is crucial to emotion concepts because it changes the very content and quality of the experience to be conceptualized. Idea, form, quality, content, affect tone, and intensity can interact more easily, with infinite gradations and greater complexity, in plastic, sensory thing presentations than in word presentations. Thing presentations are thus an integration phenomenon. They are sensory condensations of psychological conflict.

The third organizing mental process is the complex ego function that Arieti (1976) called *tertiary process*. Tertiary process organizes the relationship between primary and secondary process, resulting in the modification of each (p. 12). This tertiary process produces synthetic experiences of many types and at many levels of organization, consciousness, and experience. Tertiary process joins inside and outside; drive derivative, defense, and superego conflict elements; thing presentations and word presentations; and percepts, affects, and concepts. Thus it brings reality experience and emotional experience together to form a complex psychic reality. Conflict elements become compromise formations, compromise formations are expressed in object relations, object relations build fantasies, fantasies function as elements of personality integration—all by virtue of the synthetic capacities and attributes of the ego's tertiary process. Compromises, at all levels of organization, depend not only on dynamics and their intensity, but on the ego's tertiary process characteristics. Tertiary process integrates different levels of ego experience.

Modern ego psychology is interested in tertiary process because of the role it plays in psychoanalytic treatment, which involves new compromises and new personality integrations. Tertiary process plays a role in creativity, wherever manifested, and is therefore necessary

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for a complete descriptive theory of mind, a special concern of modern ego psychologists.

Tertiary ego function may be a felt experience, part of conscious and unconscious psychic reality, just as various content levels are (e.g., object relations). Experience of ourselves includes the experience of synthetic processes integral to personality function, our characteristic way of synthesizing thinking, feeling, and external reality (Schafer 1968; Hamilton 1996). The experience of ego processes like the tertiary process is thus a bridge between ego function and self. These tertiary process self-experiences have characteristic features that can be classified according to personality type, just as object relations or certain characteristic compromise formations can (Shapiro 1965). The precise form and experience of this in each individual is one aspect of a person's uniqueness.

How the different levels of mental function are synthesized in personality is a question answered in part by Freud's hierarchical descriptive model (Grossman 1992). Freud's hierarchical series is an interlocking hierarchy of processes and levels characterized by increasing complexity, abstraction, symbolization, and organizational level, with a recapitulation of elements, especially affects and their themes, from lower levels reorganized at a higher level. Pine (1990) has pointed to the hierarchy idea as the integrator of different levels and models. As he notes, personality, standing atop this hierarchical series, uses the elements of what is found below but reorganizes them, creating new integrations found only at the highest level. Pine cites many of the greatest names in ego psychology—Waelder, Erikson, Stone, Loewenstein, Greenacre, Loewald, Sandler, and Wallerstein—as having provided preliminary formulations in this regard. The hierarchy model has the great advantage of preserving differences yet describing relationships between them; it situates them at different levels but shows these are connected to and influenced by each other. Pine notes that the hierarchical model can thus encompass the different theoretical views of conflict theory, object relations thought, and self psychology. It is therefore basic to modern ego psychology.

But hierarchy has to date been conceptualized with no specified mechanism to underlie the relationships within it. To remedy this, I propose the tertiary process as the specific mechanism by which the different levels of human mental function are connected. Understanding that the synthetic function refers specifically to mechanisms of the ter-

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tiary process can help us describe exact relations between levels. Tertiary process organizes the hierarchy, beginning with perception and affect, moving up to lower-order organizations of conflict and object relations, and finally to higher-order organizations of agency, self, and personality. The tertiary process collects these elements, groups them, forms sequences, compares and contrasts them, and creates metaphors for them, thereby building complexity. Most important, layers of complexity, both conceptual and affective, emerge in the new construction. At higher conceptual levels, percept and affect remain but have a relation to concept different from that obtaining at lower levels. What is concretely rendered only in thing presentations and discharged in fantasy at object relations levels may be abstractly rendered at higher levels. Affect experience shifts progressively, moving up the hierarchy from predominantly perceptual affect to affect connected with objects and then to affects connected directly to abstract concepts and word presentations. At the level of personality, thing presentations are decondensed and their concepts and affects experienced as attitudes. Moving up the hierarchy occasions changes in affect quality, affect modality, and affect mixtures. One result of these changes is affect complexity and depth. These affect experiences shift dramatically in psychoanalytic treatment, where recombination occurs quite frequently.

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The role of tertiary process in organizing hierarchies of mental experience into character or personality may thus be studied in the psychoanalytic situation. One finds tertiary hierarchical processes reflected especially in the synthetic function of the psychoanalyst and of the treatment. The psychoanalytic process is different in each patient-analyst pair (the contribution of the interpersonalists and the intersubjectivists), in each phase of analysis (the contribution of the developmentalists), and in different illnesses (the contribution of medical psychoanalysts).

Case Presentation

The following case illustrates some of these principles. Miss A., forty years old, came into psychoanalytic treatment because of continuous disappointment in romance. Although friendly with many warm and giving men, she fell in love with one cold and distant man after another. She experienced herself as helplessly in love with and sexually aroused by them but was bitterly disappointed when they finally abandoned her, always at the point when she pushed for marriage. She

would then enter a depressive state, with strong feelings of worthlessness and self-denigration.

In her analysis she discovered that her romantic enslavement to an "ice prince" had its history in a strong, ambivalent attachment to an "ice father." He had abandoned the family when she was six for a series of other women and marriages. The elements of her conflict were revealed in analysis to be grandiose oedipal wishes to warm up her father and bring him home, thereby healing a loss, repairing her self-esteem, and demonstrating superiority over her mother, whom she regarded as sexless, passive, and failed. The element of guilt over her oedipal fantasy of denigration and betrayal of her mother by competitively capturing and repairing her father was gratified by the inevitable failure of the impossible, grandiose romantic goals she set herself. This compromise formation resulted in sequential "ice liaisons"—without commitment, without change, and without growth.

Her ice prince fantasy could not be understood solely through its oedipal constituents because it was also an attempt at a synthetic resolution of conflict. The ice prince was a wished-for transformation synthesis symbolizing an intact, loving family, each leg of the oedipal triangle at peace with the others. This was illustrated by a nursery rhyme she remembered from childhood: "Mommy horse and daddy horse are proud as they can be—because they have a baby horse and baby horse makes three!" This rhyme always made her tearful. To her, it portrayed a magical oedipal synthesis that would enable her finally to feel whole, happy, and validated, with a sense of belonging instead of feeling bitter, lonely, alienated, wanting, deficient, and out in the cold. She felt lonely and alienated as a personality attitude that, like a mood, colored all conflicts and all object relations. This fantasy, with its complex, layered affects, was linked to the synthesis, rather than to any one of its conflict elements. This personality synthesis required understanding and exploration of the layers of affect at the level of the personality compromise before she would allow analysis of the constituents of the oedipal conflict. This level of compromise synthesized important thematic object relations and affects, as well as agency conflicts.

The tertiary process revealed itself in the particular relationships in the compromise of the elements of the underlying theme (oedipal competition and guilt, ambivalence to oedipal mother and father), played out in reality object choice (warm men as friends, cold men as lovers), in fantasy object relations (romantic young woman warming up a cold

man), in the nursery rhyme (oedipal peace), and in her personality attitudes (lonely, yearning, earnest, eager).

Of special note was how long her psychological growth and life were stalemated by these conflicts. That she was forty years old, had always wanted a family, but was still unmarried was due to a specific manifestation of her oedipal conflict, the inhibition of procreation. Also inhibited was all mental creativity, all tertiary process function, including personality growth and change. This situation did not yield to psychoanalytic work until it was confronted directly as an inhibition and a treatment resistance. Analysis gradually revealed it to be a guilt-motivated sacrifice. It was the talion price to be paid for trying to be the vehicle for psychological rebirth of her father, her mother's husband. She had given up any other generative experience or capacity.

Disruptions of tertiary process and defenses against it may need direct and specific attention in psychoanalytic interpretations and confrontations. With interpretations about her inhibition of all generative activity, a series of new compromises emerged as tertiary process began to function again in the patient, producing a series of new relationships among conflict elements and resulting compromises. First came romances with more ice princes, but with the change that now she left them. This resulted in considerable diminution of her depressive reaction, with its associated aggression against herself. Instead she experienced great anger and a sense of triumph over these men and felt self-righteously good and happy when she left them.

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Then came a romance with a warm and giving man whom she found suffocating, somehow obligating, and inhibiting sexually. She left him. She felt contempt for him, thus expressing anger and disappointment vis-à-vis her mother, who too was warm and loving. Underneath, however, the patient also felt anxiety about herself.

We thus see dramatic shifts in compromise formations in her self-experience, in experience of her objects, and in the way she organized her romantic experience. We see dramatic shifts in conflict elements (cold man becomes warm man), but also shifts in the relationship of elements of the compromise (romantic love now experienced with warm men). This is expressed in a new compromise formation.

Then came a romance with the brother of the warm and giving man she had recently left. The brother, though cooler, was capable of loving the patient and became quite romantically involved with her. She

imagined the jilted brother feeling abandonment, rage, and betrayal. She felt anxious and guilty but also triumphant, good, and happy, with strong sexual arousal. The compromise formation now expressed itself in intense romantic and sexual involvement, but with what felt to her like an incestuous attachment.

The compromise elements had again changed their relationships. Now romance was with a partly cold, partly warm object, synthesizing both mother and father. No longer defending so rigidly against the incestuous component, this component is now consciously felt. The resulting guilt anxiety is now not only conscious but attached to the romantic object. Again, there are now not only new elements (guilt anxiety) but also a new relationship of the same elements (cold men and warm men now one).

These sequential compromise formations show the same conflict elements, but defenses have shifted and compromise relationships have changed. Affect experience has been brought forward with a new compromise but is more complexly intertwined with new affect elements of previously unconscious experience, such as guilt, and is encapsulated in a single object representation instead of being divided. The affects are thus more integrated and more complex. A new and complex integrative concept is emerging but has yet to take full form. The new concept is something about herself as a woman, no longer fighting an oedipal battle but having a man of her own, somewhat like her father, somewhat like her mother. The idea is no longer to simply get a man as mother had and to do better with him. It is now to get a better model, one of her own creation. The new creation is a complex tertiary process, a synthesis having elements of previous creations integrated with new elements in a new compromise.

Her predominant feeling about herself likewise evolved and changed. These self-state feelings were organized by shifts in her superordinate personality attitudes. She went from feeling sad, defeated, worthless, and alone in an unrequiting and cold world to feeling happy, triumphant, and connected, but guilty and anxious. Her attitude shifted from angry pessimism to happy, though anxious, optimism. Tertiary process resynthesized this attitude level into the compromise. Self-feelings and personality attitudes organized, and were organized by, concomitant shifts in object relations.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Using the laboratory of psychoanalytic treatment, we can achieve a better understanding of synthetic processes of the ego within and between the varying levels or points of view. This will help us understand the relation between varying schools, because tertiary process ought to apply not just to integrations of different levels of personality clinically, but also to different viewpoints of the metapsychologies and the ways in which they relate. Observation and theory building go hand in hand. Using a combination of the hierarchy concept and tertiary process descriptions, we could take this next integrative step in modern ego psychology's development. This step will involve case reports showing relationships and integrations.

In order to integrate, we must work out common definitions, agree on terminology for observations, and decide which aspects of the different levels fit, are useful, and are observable, and which are grandiose rhetorical flourishes that are best jettisoned.

Probably we can all agree on certain definitions. "Psychodynamics" means the interplay of emotional content themes and their intensities. "Object relations" refers to fantasy contents of psychodynamic themes with characters, plot, associated motivations, and fears. Object relations are both fantasy and reality representations, current and past, with different mixes at different topographical levels. By "agencies" we usually mean clusters of similar mental functions. Agency appears at two different levels in relation to object relations. First, agency is an organizer of clusters of object relations related to the same functions (the macro level). Second, agency refers to constituents of object relations contents (the micro level). By "personality" or "self" we usually mean combinations of temperament attitudes and depersonalized attitudes of object relations (Compton 1987) and experiences of agency functions. Personality, I have proposed, is organized by tertiary synthetic ego functions (combinations of primary and secondary processes). "Synthetic ego functions" refers to processes superordinate to agency in effect, though rooted in ego capacities. These superordinate synthetic functions may have object relations contents in the experience of the function, but these ego processes are also organizers of object relations compromise formations.

Agreement on these definitions will enable us to focus on their relationships, clinically and metapsychologically. This is the integrative

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task at hand. One of the next steps requiring such an integrative view is the ego psychology description of personalty.

Another integrative step is just now being taken, one that bodes well for modern ego psychology. Tertiary processes correlate, as does much of ego function, with new advances in cognitive science, thus helping to secure one scientific base for psychoanalysis. Bucci (1997) reviews recent cognitive science research on emotional processing and proposes a multiple code model for human mentation. Aragno (1997) discusses the development and organizing role of the symbol formation function. Together Bucci and Aragno offer the most comprehensive integration of the information theory aspect of ego psychology. Modern ego psychology is very interested in the ego's representational and affect-symbolizing functions. Of all the psychoanalytic views, modern ego psychology correlates most closely with this cognitive science approach (see Levin 1997).

This fit between cognitive science and modern ego psychology is matched by their correlation with new advances in neuroscience. LeDoux (1989) on affect-encoding pathways, Marcus (1992, in press) on the relation of hallucinations to thing presentations and to all affect-symbolizing representations, Silbersweig (1995) on the neural pathways of hallucinations, Schore (1994) on affect and brain function, Andreasen (1995) on the neural pathways of random episodic memory (free association)—all are contributions to a beginning neurobiology of the affect-symbolizing processes that analysts are most expert at describing (see Nersessian and Solms (1999). These scientific advances will be rapidly evolving over the next decade, an eventuality that Freud (1950) looked forward to.

The psychoanalytic model of development is being neurophysiologically correlated by Hofer (1997), who looks at neurobiological regulatory processes in newborn rat pups deprived of maternal contact. He is investigating the neurobiology of the early experiences underlying later object representation and response to early loss. He is demonstrating once again the interplay between instinct, behavior, and social interaction. The human brain depends for its growth on this social environment (Eisenberg 1995), a fact crucial to modern object relations theory and research (see Beebe 1986).

These specific neurobiological correlations help modern ego psychologists understand developmental and mind-brain-body issues more broadly. The hierarchical relationships involved are becoming clearer.

This will help us clarify the mechanisms and role of treatment combinations of psychoanalysis and psychotropic medication. The future will see increased interest in such treatment by ego psychologists because of its therapeutic power for the "widened scope" patient.

Crucial also to our scientific base will be the process research of Luborsky (1993), Vaughan and Roose (1995), and Waldron (1997). Likely to emerge are studies looking at outcome efficacy (Weber et al. 1985) of psychoanalysis in specific illnesses (Wallerstein 1986), such as depression or narcissistic character disorder, and in the traditional character disorders (e.g., hysterical character and obsessive character). If they do appear, they may well clarify the unique role of psychoanalytic therapy in treating specific illnesses and ego organizations, thereby securing another scientific base within general psychiatry and medicine. Such findings will encourage work on a theory of personality for modern ego psychology.

In summary, modern ego psychology is a scientific general psychology describing all of mental function. It takes into account all levels and perspectives. Relying on both the psychoanalytic situation and extraanalytic data, modern ego psychology is faced with its next task, that of integrating the perspectives of psychoanalysis and relevant neighboring disciplines. Careful observation of ego function will demonstrate how the ego synthesizes the various psychoanalytic viewpoints phenomenologically and, hence, how we might describe the synthesis metapsychologically.

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