

*THOUGHTS ON
PSYCHOANALYSIS AND
RELATIONSHIP TO THE
TRANSCENDENT*

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Lecture-Demonstration:

Fools rush in....



where angels fear to tread

The Critical Case

“Pastor Bill”

(And others)

Material about treatment with patients that
changed everything.

What seems certain

The initial experience was:

- Shared
- Overwhelmingly intense
- Not psychotic
- Not anticipated—came as a surprise
- Was not merely a joint construction of the two of us, rather certainly seemed to be an experience of something other and beyond us
- Had a positive, therapeutic impact on both of us

What seems certain—2

The later experiences were:

- Shared
- Intense, but not overwhelming
- Not psychotic
- Not anticipated—and each seemed less surprising
- Not merely a joint construction of the two of us, rather certainly seemed to be an experience of something other and beyond us
- Had a positive, therapeutic impact on both of us

Further, less intense experiences of the transcendent (god) continue and:

- They are valuable, centering and healthy.
- They suggest that god is available to everyone all the time, but that I (we) often ignore this potentiality.

And so...

- I am confronted with the question, why did God choose to do this?
- I think the answer is to use me (and undoubtedly others) to show that a divine presence is possible in psychotherapeutic encounters and that this is valuable.
- Poker is a good thing, since that is where Scott and I met; and our relationship has greatly facilitated what I think is my “mission.”
- I think it has had a good effect on Scott’s “mission” as well.

The point of this presentation

Psychoanalysis, psychology and psychiatry have a history of discounting the value of religion, sometimes even reducing it to a mere defense mechanism. This may be furthered by the current popular reductionism found in the work of Dawkins, Hitchens, Harris, et al. The people we will discuss might even agree with much of those critiques, albeit they would probably think the arguments are based on a “straw man” approach.

From our perspective the consequence of this is:

“[T]he primary difficulty with the alleged rationality of our age is not that it denies God the belief and loyalty of humanity, but that it denies humanity the knowledge and protection of God.”

~John

Walters: *Lapsed Agnostic*

We believe that one of the reasons why the field has ignored theology is because, *as it is usually understood*, it can make religious belief untenable or even destructive for many people.

There are coherent and reasonable theological perspectives that are consistent with psychoanalysis, particularly as understood from a self psychological perspective.

We will try to present a theological perspective that is rooted in a broad and generous understanding of the Judeo-Christian tradition, but that does not require subscription to narrowly conceived confessional commitments.

Of course, we consider it entirely inappropriate to use the consulting room as a place for religious proselytizing.

We use Heinz Kohut's psychoanalytic self psychology, relating it to the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel.

What follows is not exhaustive or complete, and we do not necessarily agree with all of it.

There certainly are other religious perspectives that may offer useful clinical and theoretical perspectives.

This is not about a Christian, Jewish, Buddhist or any other specific religious orientation to psychotherapy. Rather, we believe it has applicability and use that is independent of the religious beliefs of therapist or patient. We think it even applicable for people who are agnostics.

We do, however, agree with what a nun at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting said:

“The god of my understanding is not the same as the god who understands me.”

We are Christians, and one of us (Jones) is an ordained, Presbyterian minister working on his doctorate in theology. The other is an active Episcopalian who has strong interest in theology.

Kohut was a Jew who became a Unitarian and considered himself a Christian. Schleiermacher was a seminal Protestant theologian, Buber a Hasidic Jew, and Marcel a Catholic existentialist.

Why fools rushing in?

- 1) Because we try approach this task by summarizing in a very (insanely?) brief a format the thinking of a several people whose seminal theological thinking is consistent with a sound psychoanalytic theory.
- 2) Because these perspectives differ from many traditional religious beliefs, we are concerned that this may seem like we are repudiating those beliefs. That would be presumptuous and would not reflect our personal religious convictions accurately.
- 3) We offer this summary because it may be helpful in broadening thinking and opening therapists from many orientations to an alternative that they may find useful both personally and professionally.
- 4) Please do not draw conclusions about our beliefs from this presentation.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

- February 4, 1906 - April 9, 1945
- Son of a psychiatrist
- German pastor and theologian— Ph.D. in Theology from the University of Berlin at age 21
- A pacifist, he opposed Nazism before Hitler came to power.
- As early as 1939, he and other family members were a part of the German Resistance. They supported several attempts to assassinate Hitler (including *Valkyrie*).
- Arrested by SS and jailed March 1943
- Executed with others 3 weeks before the end of the war

Bonhoeffer

Confessing Church & “Religionless Christianity”

- The Confessing Church was founded in 1933 to both to oppose the Nazi-sponsored German Lutheran Church, the *Reichskirche*, and to offer an alternative.
- “In the place of religion there now stands the church.”
- “Our church, which has been fighting in these years only for its self-preservation, as though that were an end in itself, is incapable of taking the word of reconciliation and redemption to mankind and the world.” *L&Pp*, p. 300
- He came to think that the church had missed the point because it was concerned almost exclusively with personal beliefs that seek to guarantee individual salvation and a personal afterlife.

Bonhoeffer

“Religionless Christianity”

- This preoccupation with traditional beliefs distracts us from a direct awareness of Christ’s immanent and constant incarnation that can and must touch our lives.
- This is what he thought could help us find the will of god and act upon it.
- This is the foundation of true Christianity.
- “I should like to speak of God not on the boundaries but at the centre, not in weakness but in strength; and therefore not in death and guilt but in man’s life and goodness.” *L&PfP, p. 282*

Bonhoeffer: the point

Although not perfect, this man was able to remain steadfast to himself and his god through 2 years in prison and even at his execution. He treated his guards and other prisoners with such thoughtful grace, dignity, understanding and respect that many of them became better people—in essence he treated them therapeutically.

His relationship to god enabled him to do this.

Doesn't this suggest we might explore in a serious way what made this possible? After all, as therapists, we try to do what he did. Even at our toughest times, they are nothing compared to his.

Heinz Kohut

Founder of Self Psychology

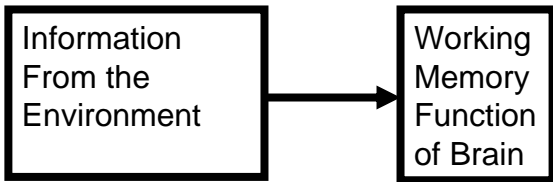


- 1913-1981
- Highly assimilated Viennese Jew
- Emigrated to Chicago in 1939
- President of American Psychoanalytic Assn.
- *The Analysis of the Self* (1981)
 - Highly controversial
- Active member of the First Unitarian Church of Chicago
- Came to consider himself a Christian

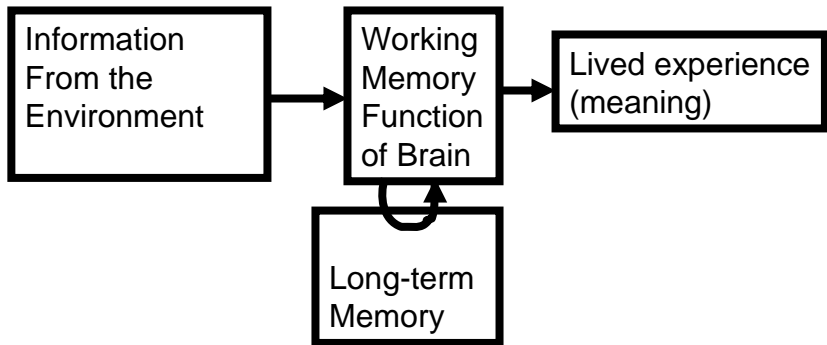
Core of Self Psychology

- Principal concern—the experience of self as constructed in lived experience
- Lived experience, is not the result of simple observation of the “facts.”
- Awareness is actively “constructed.”

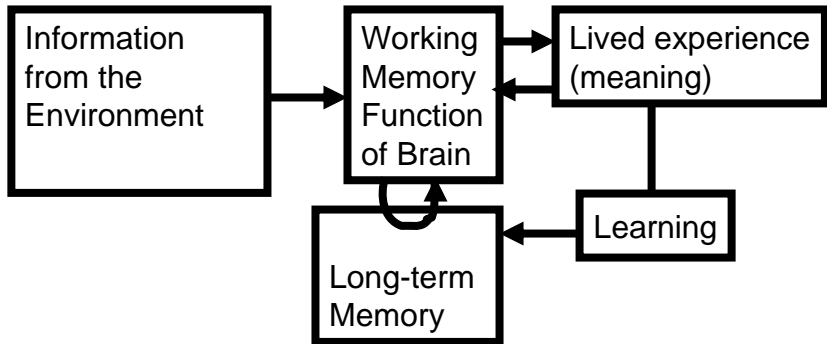
Construction of Lived Experience 1



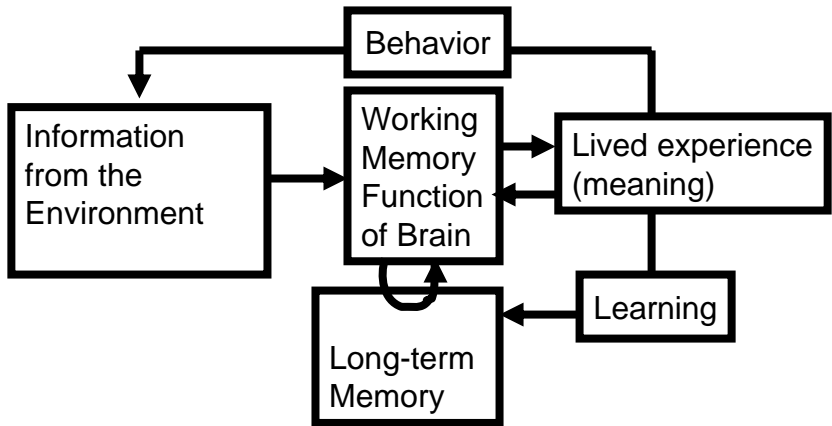
Construction of Lived Experience 2



Construction of Lived Experience 3



Construction of Lived Experience 4



Kohut's Self Psychology

- The self can develop and be maintained best when the needs of one's self states, including one's sense of worth and well-being, are met in relationships with others.
- In contrast to traditional psychoanalysis, it holds that drives (i.e. instinctual motivations of sex and aggression) as well as internal conflicts and fantasies, can not be removed from the context of the relationships in which they develop and continue to have their life.

Kohut's Self Psychology

- It had been assumed that the analyst must remain a blank screen so as not to disrupt the unfolding of the patient's conflicts and defenses.
- It became obvious to Kohut that, in principle, this was not possible. So-called neutrality was not neutral; and he came to think that it often was not therapeutic.
- Kohut realized that if he failed to understand his patient's experience from their unique perspective, that is when he failed to be sufficiently empathic, they became more withdrawn or chaotic.
- The opposite happened when he did understand them.

The Case of Miss F

- Borderline patient with chaotic behavior
- “You’re ruining my analysis with your interpretations!”
- Initially understood as resistance to correct interpretations.
- Eventually Kohut recognized that she had a point and reconsidered his responses, endeavoring to become more correctly empathic.

Patients' self-states change as a consequence of the relational matrix in the transference and in their outside lives.

- When they felt they were treated appropriately based on accurate empathic understanding, they consolidated.
- When they felt they were mistreated they felt fragmented, depleted or incoherent. This treatment could be the consequence of empathic failure.

Empathy: a definition

Empathy is not what I would feel were in the other person's shoes.

Empathy is the cognitive and affective capacity to grasp the experience of the other accurately.

This may be very different that what I would feel were I in their shoes.

For Kohut, this is a value neutral capability that may be used for both positive and negative purposes.

Accurate empathy can also be used to manipulate or even to be deliberately destructive.

Selfobject & Selfobject Experience

In psychoanalytic terms, the other is called an “object” (thus one may speak of object relations).

The object affects the self, so Kohut coined the term *selfobject*. Someone else (the object) provides self-regulating functions. The usage of the term became increasingly confusing, and current parlance is that *selfobject experiences* enable the maintenance, restoration or reorganization of the self.

Accurate empathy facilitates the potential to generate selfobject experiences.

Types of Selfobject Experiences

- **Mirroring**—regulation of self-esteem. Like a mirror reflects how we look, the response of the other reflects our worth.
 - The gleam in the mother's eyes
- **Idealizing**—regulation of affect. The idealized parent reassures, invigorates, calms.
 - The child who falls and scrapes her knee turns to her mother, who kisses the “boo-boo” and places the magic band-aid on the scrape.
 - The pain disappears
- **Twinship**—sense of alikeness--gender identity

Selfobject experiences

- Usually happen in interpersonal relationships
 - Some more salient than others
- May happen in numerous activities
 - Reading
 - Sports
 - Arts (van Gogh)
 - Nature
- “No more outgrow need for selfobject experiences than outgrow need for oxygen”
- However, in maturity, we develop more effective capacities for self-regulation and learn to seek more reliable relationships.

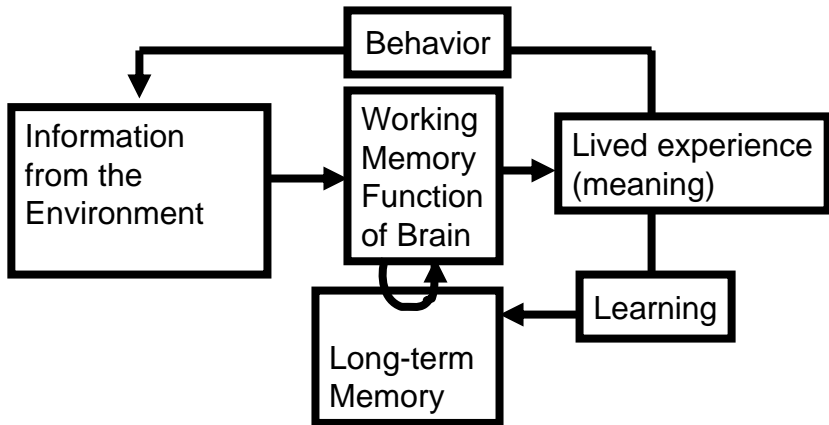
The generation of internal self-regulating capabilities is a developmental process

- Parents help the child to articulate their experience with increasing clarity and complexity as the child gets older.
- Mirroring and idealizing responses change as the child gets older.
 - Mirroring—praise given to progressively more difficult tasks
 - Idealizing—changing definition of what is and is not actually a matter of concern

Parent-child interactions

- The particular match may be more or less successful, making the possibility of selfobject experiences more or less likely for both parent and child.
- Success depends on the particular strengths and vulnerabilities of each (including genetic and other biological and psychological organizing tendencies) and environmental vicissitudes.
- Parental limitations
 - Fun-house mirror
 - Parental over- or under-reaction to situations that provoke anxiety

Construction of Lived Experience 4



Self-experience as an emergent property

- The self may be understood a product of interactions amongst a network of open systems that mutually affect each other.
- These systems (and subsystems) include:
 - Environmental: child, father, mother, grandparents, siblings, teachers, coaches, peers, and others.
 - Psychological: learned organizing principles that may be inconsistent or conflicted
 - Biological: Injury, genetics
- There are homeostatic mechanisms that set parameters within many systems.

Organizing principles

- We learn interaction patterns from what happens in relationships.
- These are remembered and affect what they anticipate in future interactions.
- These memories, or “representations” begin very early, perhaps even *in utero*.
- They are reprocessed throughout the life cycle and may change substantially as the persons’s cognitive capabilities develop
- Second Chance / Earned attachment
 - That is to say, we can and do change!

Psychopathology

Loss of a coherent, vigorous self
experience

- How severe
- How easily precipitated
- How easily and quickly restored
- In severe cases, was a functioning self ever established?
- **Symptoms**--an effort to restore the self, even if the behavior or thinking is short-sighted or destructive

Therapeutic process

- Effective, appropriate, sustained empathic immersion of the therapist in the patient's self-state provides a platform on which the self may grow and be reorganized.
- Inevitable disruptions in transference and elsewhere
 - Recognized, understood from an empathic perspective, and repaired
 - A useful form of corrective emotional experience
- Development of more effective internal self-regulation and healthier, more effective organizing principles (ways to understand the world)

Core points of self psychology

- Although the focus is on the intrapsychic experience of self, this can not be understood except in relationship
- Empathy is essential
 - Developmentally
 - In current relationships
 - In the treatment process
- Symptoms—efforts to restore or maintain the self

*Kohut's personal religious
perspective—1*

- Highly assimilated Jewish family. Fled Vienna after completing medical school in 1939.
- First Unitarian Church of Chicago
- Considered himself a Christian

Kohut's personal religious perspective—2

- Kohut thought Freud had a “profound misperception of the true purpose of religion, which is simply in another realm from science. [In fact, Kohut thought that] for many in the twentieth century psychoanalysis robbed religion of [its legitimate functions] and became a substitute religion.” --Strozier

Kohut's God & Freud's God

- “Freud’s god”
 - a projection of childhood wishes and fears a
 - unrealistic, even symptomatic defense mechanism to protect us from the terrifying recognition of death.
 - However, “throughout Freud’s letters [to the Swiss pastor and analyst, Oskar Phister] are statements such as, ‘if someday we meet above,’ ‘[my] one, quite secret prayer,’ and statements about God’s grace.” —Nicholi
- “Kohut’s god”
 - Partly, but not merely, a selfobject experience.
 - “In this construction of God, we find an empathic and understanding god who seeks to be with us as we live our lives.” —Holliman

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher



- 1768-1834
- German theologian and philosopher
- Attempt to reconcile criticisms of the Enlightenment and traditional Protestant orthodoxy
- “Father of Modern Protestant Theology”
- Hermeneutics: translation of Plato (initially with Schlegel)
- Much of the language he uses is a problem
 - Requires your forbearance and perhaps “translation”

Hermeneutics

- Definition: the study of the interpretation of written texts, especially texts in the areas of literature, religion and law.
- With Dilthey and others, Schleiermacher initiated the shift that expanded the hermeneutics from the question “How do we interpret text” to the question “How do we communicate at all?”

Hermeneutics and Relationship—1

Schleiermacher's hermeneutics requires that a translator place himself into the experience of the author (Plato) as completely as possible, particularly taking account of:

- The constraints of culture and language
- The author's unique use of language and place in that culture
- The author's personal psychology
 - generally
 - at the particular time he wrote the work being translated

While FS could not use the word empathy, he requires that the translator empathize with the author.

Hermeneutics and Relationship—2

Richard Neibuhr (1960) contends that

Schleiermacher's hermeneutic "is nothing but the special application of the dialectic that is the hall-mark of self-hood...each member of the dialogue is called upon to construct the self-hood of the other...and in so doing to become himself...." Neibuhr contends that it is necessary to understand the roots of Schleiermacher's theology "in his vision of man as a being who is essentially determined by his living relationship to others as well as to the Other."

Everything must be understood in its relational context

Dogmatics

- Dogmatic theology is a comprehensive description of Christian doctrine and morals that now has currency. --Kelsey
- FS is a modernist in that theology is not “once and forever”, pronouncing the final word or words on any given topic that concerns Christians and the Church. Theology must be done again and again for each age and era. It must always be ready to begin again at the beginning so to speak.

*The starting point for FS is
God Consciousness,
the feeling (gefühl) of the faithful.*

- He does not begin with theologians' ideas about the Truth of God.
- His concern is how faith develops and flourishes in the believer, with her relationship to God and how it is mediated in community.

God Consciousness

What Schleiermacher is all about

- Kant's influence—God is not a phenomenon (something that can be perceived with our sensory apparatus) and can not be known by *a priori* categories of experiencing (i.e. the preconditions of the construction of objects in the mind).
- None-the-less, FS thought that we can experience God, but in a “pre-reflective” way.

God Consciousness—2

Feeling (*Gefühl*), a form of immediate consciousness

- distinguished from the sort of self-awareness that is mediated by contemplation and self-reflection
- “pre-reflective”—how we experience the immediate consciousness of self
- induces in us an awareness that we all share in kind-consciousness (that is an awareness that we are all much more human than otherwise).
- possible precisely because it is free from objectifying influences, but it is not to be confused with irrationality.
- cannot be articulated, but this does not mean that it cannot be communicated.

What does “pre-reflective” mean?

- Think of yourself reading
- Someone enters the room and asks, “What are you doing?”
- When you were reading, you were not thinking you were reading. That was done “pre-reflectively.”
- Answering the question required that you break out of the pre-reflective experience and reflect on it so that you could say, “I’m reading.”
- In the next slide, there are two paintings about rain. One is immediate the other is the product of academic reflecting.

God Consciousness—3

- The Augustinian Priest Martin Laird tells of a male student who calms himself by knitting. He notices that after a short while there is a sense that god is present in him and everywhere, but that the moment he notices this god “disappears.”
- Laird contends that God does not disappear, but that the student’s mind is captured by thoughts that pull him from the experience in which he could notice God’s presence.

God Consciousness—4

- We can reflect about god's presence and communicate that, but can we share the actual experience?
- "Here, feel how this hurts." Absurd
- But empathy allows us communicate and share feelings that are preconscious.
- Feeling makes God consciousness possible
 - partial break with Kant

God consciousness—5

- “Schleiermacher places the individual in the community of uttered thought not as a monad that stands in either an external or predetermined relationship to all other individuals but as a particular rational life in which consciousness of self and of community or kind nourish each other organically.”
—R. Neibuhr
- In contrast to many subsequent existentialists, Schleiermacher seems optimistic about the possibility for genuine human communication. He thinks of hermeneutics as correctly understanding the speech of another—and he is well aware of the difficulties that are imposed by the fact that our language spiritually modifies us.

God consciousness: Absolute dependence

- Convinced that we *can* have an immediate feeling within our consciousness of the infinite and eternal within the finite and temporal
- Described this feeling as absolute dependence, over against the feelings of relative dependence and relative freedom that co-exist in our consciousness all the time as we interact with the world.
- The “whence” from which our feeling of absolute dependence flows is our God-consciousness, the essence of piety.

God consciousness

Another attempt

- Jesus is understood as fully human, but one who was perfectly and always aware of god's presence within him, through him, and around him.
- This was perfect and uninterrupted.
- Christ's complete awareness, his every thought and every action cooperates completely with the awareness that comes from the divine.
- An emptying of self
- Jesus shares his awareness with us.

Schleiermacher on Christ's Divinity and the Trinity

- Christ's divinity flows from the realization that his God-consciousness is perfectly potent.
- God on whom we absolutely depend meets us in (and perhaps as) Jesus of Nazareth, or with the belief that Christ's Holy Spirit is still present with us in the fellowship of the Redeemed. These are all concrete statements flowing from the realm of immediate self-consciousness.
- No one "feels" the doctrine of the Trinity. It is an abstraction and thus speculative, coming solely from the realm of objective self-consciousness. It is an abstraction and thus speculative, coming solely from the realm of objective self-consciousness.

Schleiermacher on divine attributes

- Reticent to speak of divine attributes as “realistically” referring to God in some sort of propositional fashion (not a Kantian phenomeon).
- Divine attributes really describe modifications of our God-consciousness as it interacts with sensible stimuli. To speak of God as
 - Omnipotence—the feeling we have of a power that is the source of the web of causes that we experience.
 - Eternal—the feeling that God is the source of the nature-system which we interact with temporally.

Divine love is accepted as divine attribute—1

- Only attribute asserted in Scripture: John 4:16: “God is love.”
- Love alone and “no other attribute can be equated thus with God.” *CF* p. 730
- Divine love is present “directly in the consciousness of redemption, and as this is the basis on which all our God-consciousness is built up, it of course represents to us the essence of God.” *CF*, p. 732

Divine love is accepted as a divine attribute—2

- Divine love is God's desire to unite with the other, namely the human race. All of creation is bound up with actualizing the divine love in the world.
- When an individual experiences "salvation", they come into communion with the God-consciousness of the Redeemer through the fellowship that shares His Spirit.

Sin: What interferes with god consciousness

- Not moral failure or transgressing rules
- Relational in character.
- God forgetfulness, which leads to the sense of God forsakenness.
- The most base form of the sensible self-consciousness, forsakes God.
- An experience a world where there is alienation and brokenness between God, self, others and environment.
- Literally to forget the most important thing one could ever know—that one is the object of the divine love.

Original Sin

- Not a metaphysical transaction based on inherited guilt over the primeval transgression of Adam in the Garden.
- Because we are raised by God forgetters in a society of God forgetters, we will have an inevitable tendency to forget and forsake the divine in lieu of lesser things. We will be taught to value the banal, to often place it above the genuine, and to deny that we are alienated in these futile pursuits.

Why sin is sin

- Not because of their ontological baseness or a puritanical moral code
 - “All activities of the flesh are good when subservient to the Spirit, and all are evil when severed from it.”
CF, p. 307
 - Essentially sin is to want the gifts without the Giver.
- Sin’s tragic effect is the loss of both:
 - The ultimate source of good
 - The relative good that comes in and through God’s gifts, which become lifeless idols.
 - Wanton sexuality, relentless materialism are sinful because they isolate us from God, others and even ourselves

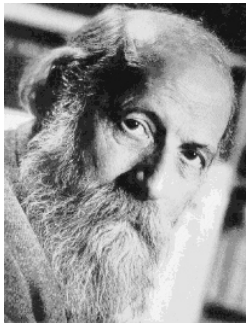
Sin and Self Psychology

There is a close parallel between Schleiermacher's "sinner" and Kohut's patient who has become a depleted or fragmented self frantically seeking to restore the self through the isolated pursuit of sensual things in a quest for wholeness that is destined to fail.

Summary: Schleiermacher & Kohut

- God consciousness is possible and is the experience of a relationship with a loving god who seeks to guide, comfort and restore us through Jesus.
- God's knowledge of us could be described as "empathic" and his judgment is based on that understanding.
- Sin is what separates us from this relationship, which is the basis of ultimate good—what is actually in our best interest.
- This is consistent with an ultimate relationship and to some extent both depends and should/could alter our current relational matrix.
- God can provide selfobject experiences.

Martin Buber (1897-1965)



- Life is essentially and always relational: we really can only think of ourselves in relationship, whether to others, nature, our work, ideas, and so forth.
- Two broad ways of relating to the other:
- **I-Thou**—direct, engaged, mutual, present and open to the other.
- **I-It**—detached, objective, not mutual, objective, and sometimes even marked by using the other to meet some personal need (which the other may well agree to meet, such as a surgeon I might consult).
- Both a part of healthy life.

Buber's
“Copernican Revolution”
in Philosophy (Heim)

The “I” participating in I-Thou is different *in essence* than the “I” engaged in the I-It.

Empathy—a sine qua non of I-Thou encounters

Kohut and Buber use term somewhat differently

- Buber: “to glide with one’s own feeling into the dynamic structure of an object...it means to ‘transpose’ oneself over there and in there.” quoted by Rotenstreich
- Kohut—value-neutral technique to gather information—cognitive and affective experience *as the other experiences it.*

What we do with the empathically gathered information is up to us--may be used for good or evil.

God—The Eternal Thou

- To the extent that we engage in I-Thou, we “emerge from [our] entanglement in busy-ness.” *I & T*, p. 67 This opens a “pre-reflective” space.
- Through everything that becomes present to us in this way, “we gaze toward the train [the hem or edge] of the eternal You.” *I & T*, p. 68

Buber and Schleiermacher

- Buber acknowledged that the invaluable moments of god's immanence are related to what Schleiermacher called god consciousness.
- Unwilling to limit this to the intuition or feeling of absolute dependence. He believed that "the onesided emphasis on this factor leads to a misunderstanding of the character of the perfect relationship.... [F]eelings merely accompany the fact of the relationship which after all is established not in the soul but between an I and a [Thou]." *I & T*, p. 129
- Buber seems to argue that the absolute dependence and the other intuitions that are a part of god consciousness are the consequence, i.e., secondary to our awareness of the relationship between God and God's creation, including us.

Miss F—Kohut's shift from I-It to I-Thou

- Confined to I-It until he finally heard the legitimacy of her complaints.
- She knew he treated her as an object, someone whom he studied carefully but mechanically, that is in a way that meant that he did not actually listen to or relate to *her*. Relating to his mental construct of her determined by his pre-existing theory
- Reconsider their interaction—a shift into the realm of I-Thou.
- *Both* changed—healthier selves to emerge
 - the patient whose self is entitled to primary attention in the psychoanalytic situation.

Buber and Child Development

“It is not as if a child first saw an object and then entered into some relationship with that. Rather, the longing for relation is primary, the cupped hand into which the being that confronts us nestles; and the relation to that, which a wordless anticipation of saying You, comes second.... In the beginning is the relation—as the category of being, as readiness, as a form that reaches out to be filled, as a model of the soul: the *a priori* of relation; *the innate You.*” *I&T*, p. 78

Kohut Connection

- For Kohut, the origin of most psychopathology is a failure in the relationship between infant/child and caretakers to succeed in the longing for relation in which the partners can find selfobject experiences, that is in I-Thou.
- The reasons that the primary relationships fail are legion.
- Repair and reorganization of the consequences requires creation in the therapeutic relationship of what we think is I-Thou.

I-It, Sin, and Empathy

- Although most I-It is not sinful, sin is in the I-It
- FS—sin is what removes us from god consciousness--what removes us from I-Thou where god consciousness emerges.
- For Kohut empathy is a value neutral to gather information
 - Empathy may be used in I-IT
 - Day to day responsiveness
 - Sophie's Choice—Styron, 1981
- Difference between ordinary failed empathy, error and intended, deliberate misuse of empathy

Buber and Kohut: Summary

- I-Thou, I-It in the therapeutic relationship
 - Spontaneity is critical
 - Boston Psychoanalytic Study Group
 - Miss F
- Relationship is primary in development
 - Infant research—facial and vocal tracking
 - Even begins *in utero*—day-old and preference
- Shift between I-Thou and I-It
 - Corrective emotional experience
- Sin—patients often consider transgression of rules rather than relational

Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973)

- Generally labeled a Christian existentialist philosopher.
- Built upon Buber's thinking
- Emphasizes two general ways of comporting ourselves towards others: *disponibilité* and *indisponibilité*.

- *Disponibilité*—I am available to someone, my resources are at hand to offer. Communication between persons who transcend their separation without merging into a unity
- *Indisponibilité*—I am not available, some measure of alienation—the other is not a Thou but a He, She or even It



- “The other, in so far as he is other, only exists for me in so far as I am open to him, in so far as he is a Thou. But I am only open to him in so far as I cease to form a circle with myself, inside which I somehow place the other, or rather his idea; for inside this circle, the other becomes the idea of the other, and the idea of the other is no longer the other *qua* other, but the other *qua* related to me.” *Being and Having*, p. 106-107
- Kohut and Miss F before and after—his theory of her was in his circle, leaving little room for her.

Ongoing relationship and pseudo-autonomy

- “It should be obvious at once that a being of this sort [one given to relating with genuine *disponibilité*] is not an autonomous whole, is not in [the] expressive English phrase, self-contained; on the contrary such a being is open and exposed, as unlike as can be to a compact impenetrable mass.” Marcel quoted by Treanor, 2004
- The futility of pride (hubris)—the illusion that it is possible to exist drawing one’s strength and capabilities solely from oneself
- FS—sin as separation
- Kohut—need for selfobject experiences are life long

- Marcel does not shy away from the affective elements that accompany being “with” the other in a relationship of reciprocal *disponibilit e*
- Love, hope and fidelity.
- We are bound to one another through “fraternity,” which is a shared sense of sharing the joys and sorrows common to the human family—an empathic grasp that we all struggle through the human condition together.
- Kohut’s twinship selfobject need

- Marcel and Buber do not emphasize the horrendous affects that we can feel when we are thrown from any sense of I-Thou.
 - *Can create a barrier to recapturing our humanity.*
- In these dark times we are in particular need of “the person who is at my disposal...who is capable of being with me with the whole of himself when I am in need; [and I do not merely need] the one who is not at my disposal [and] seems merely to offer me a temporary loan raised on his resources. For the one I am a presence; for the other I am an object.”
Marcel

“Therapeutic” version

- The therapist “sets the other at a distance,” recognizing the integrity of the other, while opening himself to the I-Thou/*disponible* encounter.
- Kohut—enables the patient to find a selfobject experience in the transference that contains their self so that it they may reorganize it into to be more flexible, coherent, and vital.

God's disponibilité (grace) in the therapeutic situation

- In the best encounters with others—we may be aware of god's presence
- With catastrophic empathic failure
 - Annihilation of self
 - Rage directed at therapist threatening his/her self experience
- It is at these horrible moments that we are in the greatest need of grace.
- God's grace is present for us to recognize and accept—we are located within a ground of being that can hold, restore and redirect us.

In summary:

- We suggest that since (or if) god exists, and since some people are able to experience this so as to provide great joy, comfort and direction, it is madness for psychotherapists not take this into account for both themselves and their patients.
- We are concerned that religion has been conflated with limited theologies that have hurt many people and that seem absurd to others.
- We have offered and brief overview of some respectable theological thinking that we think addresses this problem.
- We hope this will open a way for a deepening experience of god's presence in the consulting room that can be both useful and non-dogmatic.

“Neurosis is way of avoiding non-being by avoiding being.”

—Tillich

“All men have need of the Gods.”

—Homer