

The Origin and Nature of the "Object" in the Theories of Klein and Fairbairn¹²

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But of late I have been increasingly able to catch, if I listen attentively, the sound of the sobs which I had the strength to control in my father's presence, and which broke out only when I found myself alone with Mamma. Actually, their echo has never ceased: it is only because life is now growing more and more quiet round about me that I hear them afresh, like those convent bells which are so effectively drowned during the day by the noises of the streets that one would suppose them to have been stopped for ever, until they sound out again through the silent evening air.

Swann's Way, M. Proust

OBJECT RELATIONS THEORY HAS BECOME one of the ubiquitous phrases within contemporary psychoanalytic literature. It is used variously to refer to: theorists who have departed from the classical tradition, like Klein and Fairbairn; theorists who have remained within the tradition yet stretched its boundaries like Mahler, Jacobson and Kernberg; as well as to all those who acknowledge the importance that other people play in personality development. Within this spread of meaning and amid the controversies among dedicated proponents and denigrating detractors, the term "object relations theory" loses much of its significance. In fact, with its current wave of popularity, object relations theory threatens to degenerate into a tired psychoanalytic cliché, becoming for psychoanalysis what existentialism was for philosophy during the 1950's and 1960's—an innovative and powerful theoretical framework which became, in its ever widening application, thinned to simplistic truisms.

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¹²In homage to *Max Deutscher, Ph.D.*

Melanie Klein and W. R. D. Fairbairn have been two of the most significant theorists within psychoanalysis during the past 50 years. Traces of their influence are discernable in almost every area of contemporary psychoanalytic theory and practice. Yet, because of the politics and polemics surrounding "object relations theory" as a movement, there has been little critical and balanced appraisal of their contributions and a tendency to blur together their very different and highly distinct theoretical systems. The theories developed by Klein and Fairbairn are complex, incomplete and often internally inconsistent. Since much of the discussion of their work tends either to glorify or dismiss it, the richness of their thought is often lost. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the explication of Klein's and Fairbairn's concepts, and their differentiation from each other, through a detailed examination of their views concerning the origins and nature of "objects," a concept which occupies a central place within both systems.¹

"Object was the term chosen by Freud to designate the target of the drives, the "other," real or imaginary, toward whom the drive is directed. Although other persons are clearly central to many of Freud's clinical concepts, the "object" is the least intrinsic, most "accidental" feature within his formulations concerning the nature of the drives. The specific "source," "aim," and "impetus," are all *a priori*, inherent aspects of drive; the particular object is serendipitously tacked on through experience. All of the most important psychic processes are produced by excesses or deficiencies of gratification; the object is merely the vehicle through which gratification is either obtained or denied. In Freud's system, primary narcissism, in which all libido is directed towards the ego, is the earliest developmental stage, *before* libido is directed towards objects apart from the ego itself. This reflects the temporally secondary nature of objects within classical theory.

Although he never employed the term "internal object" as such, Freud, from the beginning of his work, had described clinical phenomena involving internal "voices," images, parental values, etc. These were drawn together theoretically with the introduction of the concept of the super-ego in 1923. The super-ego, product of the internalization at the conclusion of the oedipal period of images and aspects of the parents, generally serves as the ego's ally in controlling the intensity of oedipal desires and conflicts. It functions as an internal presence with structural properties—the child fantasizes and imagines these values and images of the parents within his psyche, and these in turn aid the ego in the channeling of drive energies. Thus, for Freud, external objects, and the superego as an "internal object", serve similar functions; they are vehicles for drive gratification and regulation.

The Object in Klein's System

Klein further developed the notion of internal objects, and this was central in the expanded role of objects in her own and Fairbairn's work. In her early papers she had described more and more complex phantasies² in young children concerning their mothers' "insides." The latter were believed to contain all varieties of substances, organs, babies, etc. During the late 1920's, Klein began to write of parallel phantasies which the child develops concerning his *own* insides, a place similar to his mother's interior, also populated by body parts, substances, people, etc. In contrast to Freud's super-ego concept, Klein suggests that these phantasies of internal presences begin in the first months of life. As development proceeds, Klein suggests, representations of *all* experiences and relations with significant others also become internalized, in an effort to preserve and protect them. This complex set of internalized object relations is established, and phantasies and anxieties concerning the state of one's internal object world become the underlying basis, Klein was later to claim, for one's behavior, moods, and sense of self.

Klein conceives of the drives as more tightly bound to objects, both internal and external, than did Freud, and hence she rejected the notion of "primary narcissism." The infant, Klein argued, has a much deeper and more immediate relation to others than previous psychoanalytic theory has credited him with. (1932, p. 33) This rejection of the concept of "primary narcissism" was no mere theoretical refinement. Narcissism had been applied, within classical psychoanalysis, as an explanatory concept with regard to many clinical phenomena, ranging from tics (Ferenczi 1921) to schizophrenia (Freud 1914), and as a tool for understanding rigid resistances within the psychoanalytic situation itself (Abraham 1919). Klein and her collaborators took issue with these explanations. They argued that seemingly narcissistic manifestations like tics (Klein 1925), schizophrenia (Klein 1960) and extreme resistances in analysis (Reviere 1936) are not objectless states (i.e., with only the ego as object), but reflect intense relations to *internal* objects. For Klein, the content and nature of relations with objects, both real people in the outside world and phantasized images of others imagined as internal presences, are *the* crucial determinant of most important psychical processes, both normal and pathological. She argued that Freud's "narcissistic libido" reflects not a cathexis of the ego itself, but of internal objects, and thus replaced Freud's distinction between narcissistic libido and object libido with the distinction between relations to internal vs. relations to external objects.

¹This paper concerns itself explicitly with Klein and Fairbairn, not with "Kleinian" theory as a whole, which, particularly in the work of Bion and Meltzer, has extended *a segment* of Klein's formulations in a speculative, extremely philosophical direction, nor with Guntrip's "extensions" of Fairbairn's formulations which, in my view, fundamentally alter the thrust of Fairbairn's vision.

²The Kleinian school has adopted the spelling phantasy to differentiate the pervasive and largely unconscious mental processes referred to by Klein from fantasy in Freud and others which generally refers to more circumscribed, largely substitutive, and usually conscious processes. I have employed this same usage.

Where does the content of the patient's images, perceptions and phantasies of objects, external and internal, come from? Klein devotes considerable effort to this question, and there has been much controversy concerning her resulting formulations. Her critics (e.g. Guntrip 1971) accuse Klein of depicting the objects of human passion as phantasmogoric, solipsistic creations, with no necessary connection to the outside world. Her adherents dismiss these criticisms, pointing to Klein's frequent mention of the importance of real others. But the controversy remains unresolved. It derives from the fact that Klein actually developed several quite different formulations concerning the origins of objects, all highly innovative. One or another of these explanations dominates her writing at any particular time, while the others recede into the background. At some points she attempts to integrate some of them with each other, but only incompletely and suggestively. In this respect Klein's creative style is similar to Freud's; both seemed more interested in generating new concepts than in integrating new ideas with earlier ones. Much of the unnecessary controversy surrounding Klein's contributions stems from efforts by her disciples, and her detractors, to present her views as if they were comprehensive and internally consistent. I will try to avoid this unnecessary distortion by considering each formulation in turn.

In the most prevalent and widely known of Klein's formulations concerning the origin of objects she suggests that objects are inherent in, and thereby created out of the drives themselves, independent of real others in the external world; "... the child's earliest reality is wholly phantastic." (1930, p. 238) In this formulation, Klein argues that perceptions of real others are merely a scaffolding for projections of the child's innate object images. How is this possible? How can the child know of others and the outside world before he encounters them in experience? At various places in her writing, Klein proposes different explanations concerning the generation of inherent internal objects. One explanation involves a novel approach to understanding the nature of desire itself. This is implicit in Klein's writings throughout, and was finally argued explicitly by S. Isaacs (1943). Isaacs suggests that desire implies an object of that desire; desire is always *desire for something*. Implicit in the experience of wanting is some image, some phantasy of the conditions leading to the gratification of the wanting. In Freudian metapsychology, the drives are uninformed about the nature of objects and reality, about potential vehicles for their gratification; this objectlessness (apart from the ego itself) persists until objects are thrust upon the infant and become associatively linked with drive gratification. For Klein, the drives possess, by virtue of their very nature as desire, inherent *a priori* images of the outside world, which are sought for gratification, either in love or destruction.

Klein bases her presupposition of inherent images and the knowledge of objects separate from and prior to experience on certain more speculative passages in Freud's own work, where he posits a phylogenetic inheritance containing specific memory traces and images. This line of thought, revealing Jung's influence, is developed most fully in *Totem and Taboo*, at the peak of Jung's impact on Freudian theory, and is a minor theme appearing now and again in Freud's later writing. Klein's use of this concept is much broader and more systematic. She argues the existence not just of specific phylogenetic memory traces and images, but of an inherent, broad set of images and phantasied activities such as: breasts, penises, the womb, babies, perfection, poison, explosions, conflagrations, etc. The earliest object relations of the child are relations with images of body parts, which operate, Klein suggests, as "universal mechanisms," (1932, p. 195 f.n.) without the child necessarily having experienced the actual organs in reality. Only later do the child's images of objects take on aspects of the real objects they represent in the world. It is towards these *a priori* images that the child's drives are directed, both lovingly and hatefully, and they serve as a substratum and scaffolding onto which later experiences accrue. In her later writing, Klein further extended the principle of *a priori* knowledge and images of objects to whole objects as well. She wrote, "... the infant has an innate unconscious awareness of the existence of the mother ... this instinctual knowledge is the basis for the infant's primal relation to his mother." (1957, p. 248)

A second explanation accounting for inherent, phantastic early objects involves the earliest channeling of the death instinct, which, Klein argues, *must* take place if the infant is to survive. Klein, following Freud, felt that the infant is threatened by destruction from within immediately following birth. Freud had suggested that Eros, or the life instinct, intervenes and rechannels the death instinct. He proposed two mechanisms for this rescue operation—most of the destructiveness is turned outward into aggression towards others; some remains as primary erotogenic masochism. Klein proposes a third mechanism, an additional part of the death instinct is deflected or projected (she varies her language in different accounts) onto the external world. Thus, eros actually *creates an image* of an external object, projects part of the death instinct into it, and redirects the remainder of the destructiveness outward towards this new created object. To preclude the experience of a world populated solely by

bad objects, a portion of the life instincts likewise is projected, *creating a good object*, towards which love is then directed. The nature of the good objects, like the bad objects, is determined by the child's own motivations, as he generates a "belief in the existence of kindly and helpful figures—a belief which is founded upon the efficacy of his libido" (1932, p. 260). Thus, in this view, the first objects of the drives are created out of the drives themselves; their content is derived from the content of the child's own impulses which are now experienced as directed towards him by an external object. "By projection, by turning around libido and aggression and imbuing these objects with them, the infant's object relations come about. This is the process which underlies the cathexis of objects" (1952, p. 58). This view of the child's earliest objects as actually creations of his own drives was developed by Klein in her earliest papers to account for the harsh, primitive, punishing super-ego figures which she discovered accompanying early oedipal phantasies in the first years of life.³This explanation seemed to account for the fact that the child imagines punishments whose content matches his own aggressive phantasies. The child lives in dread of his objects destroying, burning, mutilating and poisoning him, because these activities dominate his own phantasies towards them, and therefore constitute the substance of his projections onto them. Thus, in the child's psychic economy, as with the "Lord High Executioner", the punishment always fits the crime (1928, p. 203). The world of the child, both internal and external, is populated by creatures whose nature is a reflection of the child's own instinctual life ... peopled in the child's imagination with objects who are expected to treat the child in precisely the same sadistic manner as the child is impelled to treat the objects" (1930, p. 251). The child's fear of his early objects is proportional to the degree of his own aggressive impulses, and the specific nature of these objects in his phantasies is particular to his own instinctual make-up. "... each child develops parental imagoes that are peculiar to itself" (1933, p. 270).

A third explanation for the existence of inherent, phantastic early objects was introduced by Klein in 1946. Now she suggested that the first experience of objects, internal and external, grows out of perceptual misinterpretation. Klein proposes that the experience by the child of the workings of the death instinct within is *perceived* as an attack by something foreign, apart from any specific mechanism of projection *per se*. The death instinct is "felt as fear of annihilation and takes the form of fear of persecution ... (it) attaches itself at once to an object ... or rather *it is experienced as the fear of an object*" (1946, p. 4) (emphasis added). The nature of the child's experience itself, Klein suggests, leads him to construe the existence of objects. She did not limit this formulation to the experience of the death instinct, but also suggests that in the experience by the child of any frustration of bodily needs, the physical sensations, the tension and discomfort, are experienced as foreign bodies, or as attacks produced by foreign bodies. In a later paper she suggests that pleasurable sensations such as comfort and security as well are "felt to come from good forces" (1952b, p. 49). Reviere later extended this approach to feelings of rage, suggesting that the tensions constituting the experience of rage are experienced as bad internal objects. She also suggests that the child naturally personalizes all frustrations into a presumption of a depriving other. "The unattainability of a satisfaction (privation) is physically equivalent to frustration" (1936a, p. 46)⁴.

At other points in her work, Klein suggests a very different approach to understanding the origin of objects, in which both perceptions of real, external others and images of internal objects derive from the child's experience with real others in the outside world. The full development of this line of thought emerged in the mid-1930's, with the publication of Klein's views on the depressive position. Here, the theory of the internal origins of early objects recedes into the background, and Klein posits the view that the real others in the infant's external world are

³Klein's derivation of the content of the super-ego differed from that originally posited by Freud in 1923, when he derived the super-ego from internalizations of features from the actual parents. Perhaps because Freud was so sparing in crediting Klein with any important contributions, she seems to have been particularly pleased to see Freud adapt her view later in *Civilizations and its Discontents*, where he suggests that much of the content of the super-ego derives from the child's own aggression turned inwards.

⁴Racker was to further extend this approach in his depiction of the "primary paranoid situation" to the point of eliminating projected aggression altogether in the establishment of initial bad objects.

constantly internalized, established as internal objects, and projected out onto external figures once again. Klein does not seem to consider such internalization to be a defense mechanism *per se*, but rather a mode of relating to the outside world. "The ego is constantly absorbing into itself the whole external world" (1935, p. 286). Internal objects are established corresponding to real external others, as "doubles." Not just people, but all experiences and situations are internalized. The child's internal world "... consists of innumerable objects taken into the ego, corresponding partly to the multitude of varying aspects, good and bad, in which the parents appeared to the child's unconscious mind ... they also represent all the real people who are continually being internalized" (1940, p. 330–1). This view of objects, particularly internal objects, as constituted from the beginning by perceptions of real others was elaborated by several of Klein's collaborators. Reviere notes that the term "introjection" is best not restricted to a defense mechanism, that it "operates continually from the first dawning perception of something external to me" (1936a, p. 51). Heiman (1952) further extends the range of this process of internalization, seemingly making it synonymous with perception in general. When the ego receives stimuli from outside, it absorbs them and makes them part of itself, it introjects them" (p. 125)⁵.

If objects derive both from internal and external sources, how do images arising from these different sources intersect and join? Klein approaches this tricky problem of the blending of object images in several different ways; it is not apparent how these different formulations concerning synthesis can themselves be reconciled with each other.

One combinatory approach suggested by Klein involves a simple temporal sequence. Early objects are internally derived, largely generated out of the child's numerous and varied sadistic impulses. Therefore, they tend to be essentially harsh and punitive. Later images of the real parents are internalized; these are at first largely kind and benevolent imagoes, "magic helpers." Klein proposes a layering process, in which the harsh "inner super-ego" is overlaid by the kinder parental imagoes. Gradually, over time, the early objects are transformed, softened by the images of the real parents. The closer the content of internal objects comes to real objects, Klein suggests, the less the pathology (1932, p. 217). Real objects provide a crucial ameliorative function. For example, Klein suggests that the only child, like all children, has hateful relations with "bad" sibling objects, whom he phantasizes destroying inside mother's womb and from whom he fears retaliation. Yet, unlike children with brothers and sisters the only child is deprived of the "opportunity of developing a positive relation to them in reality" (1932, p. 74). Thus, although they play a temporally secondary role, real objects provide a crucial vehicle for the transformation of the earliest, phantastic objects into less frightening, more realistic representations of other people.

A second formulation concerning the blending of internally-derived and externally-derived objects posits a more immediate mix. At points Klein suggests that early objects derive essentially from real external figures, but that they are distorted through the child's projections of his own impulses onto them. These early images are "constructed on the basis of the real oedipus objects and the stamp of the pre-genital instinctual impulses." Thus, around a kernel of real perception is elaborated a mirror image of the child's own motives. These object images contain features of the real mother and father, but grossly distorted, resulting in figures of an "incredible or phantastic character" (1933, p. 268).

⁵The differences between the establishment of internal objects and simple memory, the recording of experience, become blurred here.

A third approach to the problem of blending posits a more fluid mechanism of perpetual cycles of projection and introjection. Early internal objects of a harsh and phantastic nature are constantly being projected onto the external world. Perceptions of real objects in the external world blend in with the projected images. A subsequent reinternalization takes place in which the resulting internal objects are partially transformed by the perceptions of real objects. Klein (1932) suggests that the early establishment of harsh super-ego figures actually stimulates object relations in the real world, as the child seeks out allies and sources of reassurance which in turn, transform his internal objects.

In the early stages the projection of his terrifying imagos into the external world turns that world into a place of danger and his objects into enemies; while the simultaneous introjection of real objects who are in fact well-disposed to him works in the opposite direction and lessens the force of his fear of the terrifying imagos. Viewed in this light, super-ego formation, object-relations and adaption to reality are the result of an interaction between the projection of the individual's sadistic impulses and the introjection of his objects (1932, p. 209).

This process also forms the basis for the repetition compulsion, which involves a constant attempt to establish external danger situations to represent central, internal anxieties (1932, p. 70). To the extent to which one can perceive discrepancies between internally-derived anticipations and reality, to allow something new to happen, the internal world is transformed accordingly, and the cycle of projection and introjection has a positive, progressive direction. To the extent to which one finds confirmation in reality for internally-derived anticipations, or is able to induce others to play the anticipated roles, the bad internal objects are simply reinforced, and the cycle has a negative, regressive direction.

In Klein's system, relations with objects occupy center-stage. Both phantastic images of others as internal and external presences as well as experience with others in the external world play dominant roles in the child's emotional life from the very beginning. Relations with internal objects constitute, for Klein, the very fabric of the self. However, Klein does not provide a unified theory concerning the origins and nature of objects. She developed several highly innovative formulations concerning inherent, *a priori* origins of objects, a comprehensive view of object images and internal objects as deriving from the absorption of real experience with others, and several possible mechanisms for the blending of these products.

Klein's formulations stressing the *a priori* and phantastic origin of objects were developed prior to 1934, during the period in which aggression was her major focus, while the view stressing the synthesis of object images out of absorptions of experience with real others was developed during the period in which depressive anxiety and reparation were her major focus. This is not happenstance. While Klein's focus was on aggression, it was bad or hateful objects which she was most concerned with. Her papers on depressive anxiety, on the other hand, focus more on the good objects and their feared destruction. Klein has a tendency to see bad objects as internally derived (projectively), i.e. from the child's own drives, and good objects as derived largely from external others (introjectively). Unfortunately, each of her formulations is postulated as a universal mechanism for the origin of objects; therefore, this distinction becomes blurred, resulting in what seem to be incongruent and, perhaps, incompatible concepts. Klein's tendency to view bad objects as created internally and good objects as absorbed from the outside stems from the conceptual proximity of her work to classical instinct theory. Klein, as Freud, sees the source of difficulties in living as arising from internal, constitutional sources; real others in Klein's writing serve to ameliorate anxiety arising from internal origins. Klein minimizes the pathogenic significance of parental anxiety, ambivalence and character pathology. Fairbairn, in reaction to this omission in Klein's work, makes parental deprivation the *exclusive* cause of psychopathology.

The cumulative impression of Klein's formulations concerning the origin and nature of objects is that of an incomplete patchwork. Her contributions consist of a rich but loosely organized set of ideas and approaches, which tend to be juxtaposed to, rather than fully integrated, with each other.

⁶In these depictions of the structuring of relations with others on the basis of characteristic anxiety situations, and in her brief mention of the role of anticipation and the induction of others to play desired roles, Klein is venturing into the kind of approach Sullivan emphasized in his study of interpersonal relations. (c.f. Klein 1936, p. 115)

The "Object" in Fairbairn's System

Fairbairn came to intellectual maturity in a climate dominated by Klein's extensions and elaborations of Freud's theory. His early papers are written in a distinctively Kleinian mode with extensive use of her concept of internal objects. Although in his later work Fairbairn retains much of Klein's language, the meaning he attributes to these terms has changed. Fairbairn retained the terms "objects" and "internal objects," yet his conceptualization of the origin and nature of objects is quite different from Klein's; these differences reflect Fairbairn's more radical rejection of classical drive theory as well as other fundamental divergences between the Kleinian and Fairbairnian systems.

At the center of Fairbairn's broad and varied contributions lies his critique and reformulation of the psychoanalytic theory of motivation—the drive theory. The basic motivational unit within drive theory is the impulse. Impulses are derivatives of drive tensions, and provide the energy which fuels all activities of the psychic apparatus.⁷ Fairbairn pointed out that although Freud's later work stressed the functioning of the ego and the super-ego, the more social dimensions of the personality, and although Klein's work has elaborated a complex theory of internal objects, the source of motivational energy for both classical and Kleinian theory remained the instinctual impulse. The psychology of the ego and its objects had been superimposed upon the earlier psychology of impulses. Fairbairn argued that the basic assumptions upon which the drive theory rests are anachronistic (derived from 19th century Newtonian physics) and misleading, and, in the broadest sense, he saw his work as entailing a "... reintegration of Freud's views on the basis of a differing set of underlying scientific principles" (1946, p. 149). The first step in this reintegration was the "recasting and reorientation of the libido theory" (1941, p. 28).

Within Freud's system, the most salient and most constant characteristic of the functioning of the psychic apparatus is its propulsion towards tension-reduction, otherwise known as the pleasure principle. The ultimate goal of all impulses is the satisfaction accompanying the reduction of bodily tension, experienced as pleasure.⁸ Impulses become directed toward objects (other than the ego itself) only when objects present themselves and prove useful in reducing tension. Fairbairn focused his disagreement with drive theory on the proposition that libido is not pleasure-seeking, but object-seeking. This principle can be understood as an extension of Klein's amendments of drive theory. We have noted that Klein argued that objects are not added onto impulses secondarily through experience, but are built into the impulses from the start, *a priori*. For Klein, however, as for Freud, the fundamental aim of the impulse is still satisfaction—the object is a means toward that end. Fairbairn explicitly reverses this means/end relationship. He argues that the object is not only built into the impulses from the start, but that the main characteristic of libidinal energy is its object-seeking quality. Pleasure is not the end goal of the impulse, but a means to its real end, relations with others.

What is the nature of the "objects" towards which the libido is striving? In classical drive theory the object facilitates the attainment of the ultimate aim of the impulse which is satisfaction. Just about anything can become the object of an instinctual impulse—another person, a body part of another person, a part of the subject's own body, a piece of the inanimate world, etc.—contingent solely on having been associatively linked with the reduction of the tension of the impulse. "Natural objects," for Fairbairn, objects which the libido seeks prior to any deprivation, are simply other people. Fairbairn, as Sullivan, felt that there is a naturally unfolding, maturational sequence of needs for various kinds of relatedness with others, from infantile dependence to the mature intimacy of adult love. If relations with others were non-problematic, if satisfying contacts could be established and maintained, psychology would consist simply of the study of the individual's relations with other people. However, Fairbairn felt that this is not the case with modern man. Relations with others, particularly the earliest needs of infantile

⁷Descriptions of classical drive theory in this paper refer to drive theory at the time Fairbairn was writing and do not reflect subsequent changes in Freudian thinking.

⁸Freud (1924) revised this conception in his later work to regard pleasure not as the consequence of a simple reduction of tension, but as the consequence of a particular rhythm of increases and decreases in tension, but he never revised his basic metapsychology accordingly.

dependence on maternal figures, become unsatisfying, "bad." Fairbairn suggests that one large factor in this general deprivation has been the interference which civilization has caused in the mother-infant bond. With other animals, the young are in direct, physical contact with mothers for as long as their physical helplessness and dependency require. With humans, with the numerous other domestic, economic and social claims on the mother, this intense and unbroken contact is seldom possible. The consequence of what Fairbairn regards as this unnatural separation is that early relations with objects becomes "bad, " or depriving. It becomes too painful to long for and depend on an object which is physically or emotionally absent a good deal of the time. Therefore, the child establishes internal objects inside himself, which act as substitutes and solutions for unsatisfying relationships with real external objects. These objects are wholly compensatory, unnatural and not dictated by the biological object-seeking nature of libido (1941, p. 40). The greater the degree of interference and deprivation in relations with its "natural" objects, real people, the greater the need for the ego to establish relations with internal objects. Thus, for Fairbairn, while psychology is the "study of the relations of the individual to his objects, " psychopathology is the "study of the relations of the ego to its internalized objects." (1941, p. 60)

Under what circumstances and through what processes are internal objects established? Fairbairn's view of the *nature* of internal objects remained fixed throughout. They are compensatory substitutes for unsatisfactory relations with real others. His account of the specific motives and circumstances leading up to the establishment of these compensatory structures varies, however. In each of his major theoretical papers (1941), (1943), (1944) as well as in a review of his theory in 1951, he presents a somewhat different solution to this problem. They are not wholly incompatible with each other, nor are they easily integratable. Each has its own theoretical weakness and rough spots, and none seems wholly satisfactory.

In 1941, Fairbairn speaks of the internalization of objects simply as the result of the general incorporative tendencies in the early oral period. He alludes to a general internalization of both good and bad objects during the early months of life, in response to frustrations in external relations with others. The "... incorporation of the object ... is the process whereby the individual attempts to deal with frustrations in oral relationships." (p. 34) If the child runs into later difficulties in his relations with others, he returns to these early incorporated objects and regressively reactivates his relations with them. In this approach to the process of internalization, Fairbairn is still clearly greatly influenced by drive theory, particularly as elaborated by Klein. The infant is seen as by nature incorporative, which is a property of his oral attitude towards the world. He takes in because that is his nature, as dictated by his biological equipment. "... the early urge to incorporate is essentially a libidinal urge." (p. 48) Fairbairn adds the stipulation that the taking in is preceded by frustration, departing from Klein's more fluid view that *all* experiences with objects eventually become internalized. However, at this point Fairbairn still roots internalization in the biological properties of orality.

In 1943 Fairbairn offers a second view of the circumstances surrounding the first internalization, shifting the motivational focus away from oral incorporation towards motives more purely concerned with object relations and defense. In this account, Fairbairn stresses the extent to which parents who are emotionally absent, intrusive or chaotic and inconsistent pose a considerable dilemma for the child. He cannot do without them, yet living in a world in which one's parents, the constituents of one's entire interpersonal world, are unavailable or arbitrary is unbearably painful. Therefore, according to Fairbairn, the first in a series of internalizations, repressions and splits takes place, based on the necessity for preserving the illusion of the goodness of the parents as real figures in the outside world. The child separates and internalizes the bad aspects of the parents—it is not they who are bad, it is he. The badness is inside him; if he were different, their love would be forthcoming. Every child needs to feel that his parents understand the world, are just and dependable. If he doesn't experience them in these ways, he transfers the problem into himself. He takes upon himself the "burden of the badness" (1943, p. 65). The "badness, " the undesirable qualities of the parents, i.e. the depression, the disorganization, the sadism, are now in him. These "bad" features become bad objects, with whom the ego identifies (through primary identification). The child has purchased outer security at the price of sacrificing internal security. Another feature of this initial internalization process is the perpetuation of the fantasy of omnipotent control. When the child experiences the "badness" as outside, in the real parents, he feels painfully unable to make any impact at all. If the "badness" is inside him, he preservesthe hope of omnipotent control over it.

A secondary process of internalization follows the initial internalization of the "bad" aspects of the parents which Fairbairn terms the "moral defense." This involves the establishment of "good" internal objects. As a consequence of the initial internalization, Fairbairn reasoned, the child feels himself to be irreversibly and unconditionally bad. He is unloved, not because of any constriction or difficulty in the mother, but because he himself is bad, unlovable. The moral defense involves the internalization of good and ideal aspects of the parent to create the possibility of internal goodness. The identification with the good objects serves as a defense against the badness the child feels as a result of the initial internalization. He is now morally and conditionally bad, rather than libidinally and unconditionally bad. The experience of the child is now that he *has been* bad and undeserving of the parents' love, but that he can be good, through identification with his good objects. One sees this kind of internal logic again and again in clinical work with patients who constantly place grandiose and perfectionistic demands upon themselves, who have, in classical language, a harsh and demanding superego. Fairbairn argues that the self-accusations and perfectionistic strivings are not fundamentally punishments for fantasied crimes and instinctual gratifications, as they are viewed within the classical model. They result from the double process of internalization comprising the moral defense, in which the child protects himself from the core feeling of helplessness and despair at the lack of relatedness with the parent. First, he internalizes the badness—it is not they who are bad, but he. Second, he internalizes a good object—(composed of actual, admired qualities or values of the parent)—if only he can live up to his perfectionistic strivings, his parents will be available and love him.

The two basic approaches to internalization which Fairbairn had presented up until this point are contradictory. The original 1941 approach, with its Kleinian emphasis on the innate oral incorporative tendencies in the child, suggested that an early internalization of both good and bad objects takes place in the earliest months of life. The 1943–4 approach, with its stress on the defensive and purely object-relational aspects of internalization suggested that the first objects internalized are bad objects, enabling the child to preserve the illusion of good relatedness to the real mother and protect her from intense libidinal and aggressive affects. The good object is internalized only secondarily through the "moral defense." In 1951 Fairbairn attempted to reconcile these two views. He presents a synthetic view enabling him to have both good and bad objects internalized from the beginning, and yet to define internalization as a defensive phenomenon. What he argued was that the first internalization is of an original "pre-ambivalent object," the earliest experience of the mother, in which the child has not yet fully separated the gratifying and ungratifying features. The motive for this internalization, Fairbairn stresses, is frustration—the object is internalized *because* it is not wholly gratifying. If it were, no internalization would be necessary. Although the object is internalized through an oral incorporative response to frustration, it soon becomes employed by the ego in its struggle to maintain good object relations. Fairbairn reasoned that the ego becomes ambivalent about this originally pre-ambivalent object. In an effort to control it, it splits it into gratifying and ungratifying aspects, and then splits the ungratifying aspects further into exciting and rejecting components.

This solution reflects Fairbairn's characteristic tendency to become absorbed in schematic, intricate theoretical constructs which drift away from their clinical and developmental referents. The revision works within its own terms, but it is not clear what those terms mean. As Winnicott and Khan (1953) point out in their review of Fairbairn's work, this solution simply creates more problems than it solves. First, if the original "pre-ambivalent object" is internalized because it is in "some measure gratifying and some measure ungratifying," what is meant by ambivalence? If the child has been able to distinguish experientially between gratifying and ungratifying aspects, is not this ambivalence? If this *is* the case, why would it be necessary to internalize the whole object? Second, what is the process through which the ego would develop ambivalence toward an already internalized object? Unless Fairbairn is implying a much more fluid relationship between real objects and internal objects than he usually presupposes, this process seems impossible to grasp. Third, if the ideal object is already internalized as a facet of the original pre-ambivalent object, what becomes of the moral defense? What of Fairbairn's argument that identification with good internal objects serves as a distraction from and bulwark against internalized bad objects? The neatness of the 1951 revision is contrived, and Fairbairn's attempt to synthesize his 1941 Kleinian-influenced view with his 1943–4 purely object relations approach doesn't work. Further, it seems unnecessary. The latter approach, in its stress on internalization as a defensive protection of the relationship with the parents, in which bad objects are internalized first, followed by good objects as part of a secondary "moral defense," seems to be his most compelling view, and the one most consistent with the general thrust of his theoretical innovations.

The Object for Klein and Fairbairn Compared

The major movement in the history of psychoanalytic ideas over the past 40 years has been a shift in emphasis from drives and their transformations to relations with others.⁹ Most broadly put, this shift rests on the premise that the major motivational thrust within human experience and the major determinant of the patterning of personality and psychopathology is not the search for pleasure through drive gratification, but the establishment and maintenance of relations with others, real and imaginary, past and present. Klein and Fairbairn have played key roles in this larger movement. Klein served as a transitional figure, straddling Freudian drive theory and relational concepts; Fairbairn formulated one of the purest and most comprehensive theories of object relations, and his work offers, together with the interpersonal theory of H. S. Sullivan, the most thorough-going and systematic alternative to classical drive theory.

The concept of the psychic "object" occupies a central place in the theoretical systems devised by Klein and Fairbairn, and it is the increased significance attributed by each theorist to the "object" that underlies their departures from classical Freudian metapsychology. Both Klein and Fairbairn describe relations both with real others and with fantasies of internal presences. As we have seen, these descriptions and accounts vary considerably, even within their own work. Klein offered several different approaches to understanding the origins of objects, both from internal sources as well as from the child's earliest experiences with real others. Fairbairn's view of the origins and nature of "natural objects" remained constant throughout, but he continually revised his views concerning the earliest establishment of internal objects. Despite the shifts and variability in understanding the origins and nature of "objects" taken by Klein and Fairbairn, there are consistent and fundamental differences between them with respect to their analysis of object relations, as well as with respect to their larger vision of human experience. These differences stem, partially, from Klein's transformation of, yet allegiance to, classical drive theory, and Fairbairn's abandonment of the concept of drive altogether.

For Klein, the internal object world is a natural, inevitable and continual accompaniment of all experience. Internal objects are established at the beginning of psychological life, and they become the major content of phantasy. The internal object world for Klein is the source of both life's greatest horrors and its deepest comforts. In Klein's vision of emotional health and analytic cure, internal objects play a central role. Health is constituted by a particular constellation of internal object relations, in which, with the resolution of the depressive position, the "whole object" is established and ambivalence contained. Thus, even in health, internal object relations parallel and underlie relations with real others in the external world.

For Fairbairn, internal objects are neither primary nor inevitable (theoretically). They are compensatory substitutes for unsatisfactory relations with real, external objects, the "natural," primary objects of libido. For Fairbairn, relations with internal objects are inherently masochistic. Bad internal objects are persistent temptors and persecutors, while good internal objects do not offer real gratification, but merely a refuge from relations with bad objects. In Fairbairn's vision of emotional health and analytic cure, internal objects are abolished altogether. The ego's attachment to internal objects is relinquished, and the energy bound up in internal object relations is made available to the central ego for relationships with real others in the outside world.¹⁰ Whereas in Klein's view, phantasied relations with internal objects constitute the bedrock of all experience, for Fairbairn such relations represent a secondary retreat from disturbances in relations with real people, toward whom man is more fundamentally directed.

⁹J. Greenberg and I will publish a critical history of this shift, including a fuller treatment of the systems of Klein and Fairbairn under the title *Theories of Object Relations: A Critique*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, in press.

¹⁰Perhaps the greatest weakness of Fairbairn's system is his failure to account for the residues of good object relations and the structuralization of the self on the basis of healthy identifications. For Fairbairn, all internal object relations derive from frustration and are, by definition, pathological.

Klein and Fairbairn differ not only in their views concerning the *function* of internal objects, but concerning their *content* as well. For Klein, objects tend to have *universal* features. In many of her theoretical statements she stresses the *a priori* origins of object images as: part of a phylogenetic inheritance built into the experience of desire itself, construed from early sensations, or derived from the drives through projections. Although different in terms of frequency and severity, the content of these objects is the same for everyone—good and bad breasts, good and bad penises, babies, united parental couples. Klein also stresses the importance of real people in the child's life; however, here too it is the universal features of these real objects that are most important—their anatomical characteristics as representatives of the human species, their durability in the face of phantasied attacks against them, their inevitable mixture of gratifying and depriving features. Within Klein's system, the *dramatis personae* within the external and internal object worlds is standard. Although in her case illustrations Klein occasionally mentions some more personal or characterological feature of the parents (a mother's depression, lack of warmth, dislike for the child), these features never appear in Klein's formulations concerning internal object relations, where the cast of characters is always composed of universal images.

For Fairbairn, the content of internal objects derives completely from real, external objects, fragmented and recombined, to be sure, but always deriving from the child's experiences of his actual parents. The categories into which internal object relations are organized are uniform. "Bad" objects, for Fairbairn are emotionally unavailable for the satisfaction of the child's dependency needs. Bad objects are split into exciting vs. rejecting components. Nevertheless, the content of these categories, the constituents of internal object relations in Fairbairn's system, are the personal features of the parents: the particular kind of promise and hope which the mother seemed to offer, the specific form of rejection displayed by the father, the parents' idiosyncratic ideals and values, etc.

A final major area bearing on the nature and function of objects in which Fairbairn and Klein differ is in their view of the ultimate source of pathology or suffering in human experience. For Klein, the root of evil lies in the heart of man himself, in the instincts, particularly the death instinct and its derivative, aggression. The great dilemma for the child in both the paranoid-schizoid position and the depressive position is the safe discharge of his aggression. The earliest anxiety for the child is persecutory; he experiences the threat of his own demise as the victim of his own projected aggression. For Fairbairn, on the other hand, the root of psychopathology and human suffering is maternal deprivation. Ideally perfect mothering results in a whole, non-fragmented ego, with its full libidinal potential available for relations with actual, external objects. Inadequate parenting poses grave threats to the integrity of the ego. The central anxiety for Fairbairn involves the protection of the tie to the object in the face of deprivation, and all psychopathology is understood as deriving from the ego's self-fragmentation in the service of protecting that tie and controlling its ungratifying aspects. The difference in their views of the ultimate source of evil is reflected in the different meanings of the term "bad object" in the theories of Klein and Fairbairn. For Klein, the "badness" of an object, whether internal or external, refers to malevolence, deriving ultimately from the child's own inherent destructiveness, projected onto others. By contrast, "badness" for Fairbairn means unsatisfying, depriving (1944, p. 111). The "bad object" is the one which frustrates the object seeking of the libido by its absence and unresponsiveness. For Klein, "bad objects" are reflections, creations derived from the child's own inherent and spontaneous destructiveness. For Fairbairn, "bad objects" are aspects of the parents which make them unavailable to him, and frustrate his inherent longing for contact and relation.

Conclusion: Toward Synthesis

In their understanding of the origins of human suffering Klein and Fairbairn stand in polar relation to one another; in this respect, they reflect a more general tendency inherent in psychoanalytic theory towards extreme positions on the issue of the causation and accountability for psychopathology. In his original theory of infantile seduction, Freud viewed the neurotic as an innocent childhood victim of adult molestation. Freud saw adult neurosis as incubating since early childhood, its seeds sowed by the precocious arousal of

¹¹This battle is being currently argued in the dialogue between Kernberg and Kohut concerning the origins of pathological narcissism in either constitutional aggression or failures in parental empathy respectively. (c.f. Robbins (1980) for a study of the origins of the Kohut/Kernberg controversy in what he characterizes as the "schism" between Klein and Fairbairn.)

sexuality in the child. Having discovered the apochryphal nature of these retrospective accounts, Freud concluded that the problem was not in the parents but in the sexual quality and intensity of the child's own wishes. Infantile innocence was a universal ruse—the child's own incestuous desires and murderousness were the cause of the neurosis; the role of the actual parents in the etiology of neurosis was minimized. Klein represents the farthest swing of the pendulum in this direction. For Klein, the seeds of neurosis lie in the child's inherent longings and violence. It is the child's own greed, envy, jealousy and murderousness which create early anxiety situations and generate "bad" internal objects with pathogenic properties. Other people are potential, if not always successful, ameliorating factors; human care-takers, within Klein's formulations, are important in many respects, but they play no discernable role in generating "bad" internal objects and causing psychopathology. The position developed on this issue by Fairbairn constitutes a polar over-reaction to Klein's original extreme position: for Fairbairn, neurosis derives from parental failure. The child's needs are potentially satisfiable; parental inadequacy intensifies them and produces a secondary, problematic rage. This "excess" need and rage necessitates the internalization of "bad" objects and a consequent pathogenic ego-splitting. In Fairbairn's system, and even moreso in Guntrip's extensions, the parents become universal villains, the child the passive victim. In Fairbairn's work, the essential innocence of the child has been reinstated.¹¹ The choice between a view of the child and hence the adult neurotic as either victim or villain has been perpetuated in the systems devised by Klein and Fairbairn. This choice is an unnecessarily limiting product of the preoccupation with blame, absolution and a medical model approach to difficulties in living.

The most productive development of the work established by Klein and Fairbairn requires a dialectical synthesis of a more interactional nature. It is my hope that this explication and differentiation of Klein's and Fairbairn's views concerning the origin and nature of objects will serve as a prologomena to such a synthesis. From this point of view, difficulties in living can be regarded as universal, and developing out of the interaction between unfulfillable childhood desires and longings and the necessarily human imperfections of parental caretakers. Klein's formulations of infantile greed and envy can be applied without the presupposition of inherent aggression arising within the child. The infant's actual helplessness and lack of a stable sense of time and space lend a quality of great intensity and urgency to its needs, making any deprivation very painful and reactive rage and hatefulness unavoidable. The formulations supplied by Fairbairn concerning the internalization of inevitable parental difficulties and character pathology based upon the child's active allegiance and earliest object ties can be applied without the unilateral assignation of blame onto the parents and the treatment of the child as passive victim. All caretakers, by virtue of their humanity, inevitably fail their children, each in their own particular way. Thus, internal object relations, concerning both "bad" and "good" objects are generated out of both the intensity of infantile passions as well as parental character pathology. An approach to both the child and the parent based on *accountability without blame* is necessary, making possible a more balanced view of the origins of neurosis in the interaction between the parents' difficulties in living and the child's infantile needs, immature understanding of the nature of reality, and primitive loyalties.

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