

## Goldstein: An Appreciation

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KURT GOLDSTEIN'S CONTRIBUTION to the development of psychology and psychoanalysis has been considerable. Fromm-Reichmann, for example, dedicates *Principles of Intensive Psychotherapy* to her "4 teachers": Sigmund Freud, Kurt Goldstein, Georg Groddeck & Harry Stack Sullivan, and certainly anyone schooled and

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practicing in the tradition of Interpersonal Psychoanalysis continually encounters derivatives of and resonances with Goldstein's ideas. These short excerpts from *The Organism* give ample evidence of the richness and subtlety of Goldstein's thought.

What distinguishes the great minds in the history of ideas is not only their impact on subsequent thought, but the manner in which their work serves as a continual, never depleted resource for subsequent generations in their struggles with the issues and problems of their own day. The oeuvre of Freud and Sullivan enrich us in this fashion, and these selections from Goldstein might serve us similarly, if on a lesser scale. I would like to use this brief discussion to explore the light shed by Goldstein's reflections, nearly 50 years ago, on certain key problems facing contemporary psychoanalytic theoreticians.

Clinical psychoanalysis was developed within a larger vision of human nature. Freud's drive theory was a powerful and elegant framework within which were understood every domain of human experience: motivation, the structuralization of mind, child development, and so on. Drive theory was made more compelling because drive theory itself derived from, and was wholly in the spirit of, Darwinism, that sweeping redefinition of human origins which informed and inspired every major intellectual discipline in the second half of the 19th century. We have not been created in the image of a God, but rather have evolved from "lower" species, and Freud demonstrated that we could look to animal nature—blind, driven instinctual forces—to find our underlying essence, our inner core.

What Freud and his contemporaries did not grasp—and it is inconceivable that they could have—was that looking for human nature in the behavior of animals was to pursue a metaphor, not human nature itself. Even with the psychoanalytic method, one cannot "see" the bestial in humankind, but rather can merely compare human experience and behavior to animals. Like all important metaphors, the metaphor of the beast had its day and ran its course. It dried up as the source for insights into human experience. It is maintained today only by those who would be loyal to Freudian psychoanalysis in the most concrete and literal way. Some of the more innovative contemporary authors, like Loewald and Kernberg, retain the *term* "drives"; but drives for them are motivational systems which develop in the context of early object relations—not at all like Freud's "drives", which are body-based, constitutional and pre-experiential.

I was at a conference a while ago at which an orthodox Freudian panelist broke into a discussion about some complex issues of motivation by intoning, "But we must not forget, we are animals, afterall." This was delivered both with the sense that it would be news to those present and that it would immediately illuminate the discussion with some sort of simple truth. The anachronistic nature of these expectations was striking, all the more so since "animal nature" itself has become such a complex and controversial field. Which sort of animal nature do we have? that of an ant? lemmings? dolphins? chimpanzees? Is animal nature so singular and transparent? Do we really claim to understand "animal nature"?

Goldstein warns us against the dangers of "zoomorphism", by which we look to establish our own nature by arbitrarily assigning one to "animals" and then reasoning from "lower" to "higher". Animals may not be so simple, Goldstein warns; in thinking we understand them, we may be projecting aspects of ourselves, using them as a distorted mirror in a way which has nothing to do with them at all. This has surely been a prophetic warning, as contemporary study of animal behavior suggest that Freud's vision of the nature of sexuality, while distinctly human, seems to have little to do with animals (see, e.g. Holt, 1976).

The metaphor which has been most compelling and inspirational to generations of analysts living in these last several decades, during which the metaphor of the beast has waned, has been the metaphor of the baby. Here Goldstein's warning has even more prophetic utility.

Many of the most important contributions to recent psychoanalytic thought have been grounded in speculations concerning the earliest years of life, the pre-oedipal phase of the infant's relationship to the mother. It is here, according to Klein, that life's deepest, most fundamental terrors are encountered; it is in the earliest feeding and holding experiences, according to Winnicott, that the self is either embraced and realized or fragmented; it is in the earliest dependence on the mother, according to Fairbairn, that the contact-seeking ego either remains oriented toward the real world of others or is forced back onto itself and into a world of fantastic inner shadows; it is in the earliest interactions between babies and mothers, according to contemporary ego psychology, that the ego becomes structuralized for life.

Yet, for Goldstein, infanto-morphism is just as dangerous as zoomorphism. It is possible because the experience of babies, like that of animals, is always inevitably and fundamentally inaccessible to us. Babies, like animals, can't speak up for themselves, and this allows us to see ourselves in them and then use that projection as a "scientific" justification for our ideas about ourselves. The widely discrepant nature of the babies observed by Klein, Winnicott, Guntrip and Mahler is ample evidence that when we gaze into the fresh and budding life fullness in the face of the newborn, we are seeing our own hopes, longings and fears. Thus, Stern, whose *Interpersonal World of the Infant* has so much inspired contemporary psychoanalytic thought, makes it very clear that there is a creative and imaginative leap between the data of infant research and the vision of the baby that he or anyone else paints, and that the existential dramas he portrays are best thought of as life-long struggles rather than phasic hurdles of the earliest years.

Goldstein warns us against seeking our own natures anywhere but in ourselves. He further argues against subdividing that nature into component "drives", and this argument is also interesting and pertinent. Goldstein shows us that theories of drives of any type are based on overgeneralization and reification. You observe what a person does, or people do, in specific situations, and then attribute to that particular behavior a continual existence and more generalized motivational status. This process underlies the postulation not just of sexual and aggressive drives, but also of drives like attachment, object-seeking, safety, security and so on. Surely, Goldstein suggests, people do all these things, in certain specific circumstances, but it is not at all clear whether in the absence of those circumstances, these motives are operative and "driving" the organism. It is much more conceptually parsimonious, Goldstein suggests, to portray persons not as driven, but as needing things, doing, behaving and expressing themselves in different ways in different contexts. In this emphasis on activity and agency, Goldstein's position is very similar to Sullivan's and, in more recent years, to Schafer's.

Goldstein's critique of reified metaphors and subordinate drives are persuasive, but where does he leave us in understanding motivation? The concept of self-actualization is not without its own problems. What is the self which is being actualized? what are its characteristics? Can we know what sort of self will be actualized beforehand, or only ex post facto? Does this become a fancy way of begging the question of motivation by ascribing inevitability to whatever takes place? At its worst, the concept of self-actualization can take on a fuzzy, mystical kind of haze. This was true of discussion of self-actualization within "humanistic psychology"; more recently, Kohut's references to personal "destiny" and Winnicott's sometimes reified discussions of the "true self" take on that same quality.

At its best, however, Goldstein's concept of self-actualization points us in a direction I find very fruitful in thinking about motivation and human nature. The adult human organism, Goldstein suggests, is not understandable in terms of other sorts of organisms, bestial or infantile, but has its own distinctive nature. It is not "driven" by "special" drives, but is the agent of many kinds of activities, all of which are devoted to the general project of creating, recreating and expressing itself within its relational context (see Mitchell, 1988).

This view of life as a process of self-actualization is a particularly congenial framework for thinking about the psychoanalytic process with a concern for motivation that is not formalized into a procrustean bed of motivational presuppositions. We might regard the analyst's task as precisely the engagement of the patient in an inquiry into the nature of the self that the patient actualizes over and over in different situations: in the repetitive patterns of interacting with others, in their characteristic forms of portraying and treating themselves, and, especially, in their recreation of themselves in the relationship with the analyst. Life is a process of self-actualization, Goldstein suggests to us; we do many different things in different contexts consistent with that larger project. As soon as the psychoanalytic theorist tries to stop the process by reifying or overgeneralizing the motive by removing it from the context, the larger project is lost, and we lose sight of the sense of the person creating and expressing themselves. An analytic process which emphasizes metaphor rather than reductive explanation, the process of inquiry rather than developmental or motivational schemes, seems truest to Goldstein's vision.

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