
Beyond the Reality Principle

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Table of Contents

Beyond the Reality Principle

METAPSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

AN ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE

THE QUESTION OF PRINCIPLES REOPENED

SOME CONSIDERATIONS

ON NARCISSISM AS BEING CHOSEN

ON CHOOSING AND CHOICE

REFERENCES

Beyond the Reality Principle

Freud was himself unhappy with the Reality principle, probably because it states the obvious without also stating the unobvious. That is, surely people live in some way consonant with reality and behave self-preservatively, modifying their intemperate urges as need be. But when they do not, are they simply mad or in the grip of chaos? Are they anhedonic by neurosis or by nature? The Pleasure principle requires its reaction-formations and sublimations if it is not to sink of its own weight. But the trouble with these contra actions is that they seem to exhaust the matter, though I do not think they do.

My own generalizations are based in part on patients, adult and child, who seem to me to be always slightly abstracted, as if listening for a message about what the better choice might be, and feeling, while they are awaiting revelation, that they will be done for if they don't find it. It is as if they have a mandate only part of which has been transmitted, and at that perhaps in somewhat garbled form. But they know themselves to be under orders, and like good soldiers, await first clarification, and then the inevitable question—Do you copy? Many of these instructions, so far as I have been able to tell, have to do with seeing to the future destiny of that part of the species homo sapiens which should be preserved (this is akin to what Bion meant by his “Basic Assumptions Group”). I have accordingly found it useful to keep an ear out for the ideas people formed as children, really as infants, regarding what their aspirations and obligations in this respect might be. The superego and the ego-ideal, that is to say, are categories that precede their contents and indeed organize those contents as these come along or seem to.

If there is anything to the ideas, they should be found elsewhere—indeed, they should be looked for in the Oedipus drama itself. There are (to my mind) two hints: one is the generational implication of the riddle (never mind its ironic foretelling of the need Oedipus will have to use a stick); the other is the nature of the plague. The latter may be read as an agronomic representation of the dire results of inbreeding. Deranged leaders of the Selection brigades go in for racial purity; *Mein Kampf* about this: we can never sleep safely with these Lysenkovian dreamers in our midst. There is something in us that responds to the Pied Piper.

In evolutionary theory of the Darwinian kind, there are three choices concerning who is selected and who selects. Perhaps the traditional one is that the members of a species are selected by predation and ecological pruning more generally, with the weaker members out of, and the more adaptive members in, the reproductive pool. Thus the species is always, if passively, being refined or at least redefined.

A second view holds that there is more to selection than passively sustained events—that members of a species contend for their personal survival and, by luck of that, their immortality as gene providers to the generation to come. This view opens up the matter of choice—if members of species choose one another, on what basis do they make their choices? That question leads in turn to the next step down (the first being the species as a whole, the second the enrollment of individuals within a species) The next or third level is the DNA. Genes are said, selfishly, to induce choosing behavior. That is, it is in the gene where the program for the choosiness is inscribed. On this face of it, this would seem arrant nonsense. Are we mere agents for our genes; do they ride piggy back on us? Worse, are they down there in the navigator's station calling the shots? And even if they were, by what means would the genes make their wishes known?

How genes “know” what to call for, if they do, is another, but easier question. Gene X-beta knows what gene X-beta knows and the fact that it has survived and is not recessive means that it and not Y-alpha prevails(ed). But how do genes (if they do) say, “Hey, get me something really good. And by good, I mean...

I do not know the answer to that, but I think there may be one; the essay here is set out as an approximation to the sort of answer it might turn out to be. You will see that for my answer I need premonition and preconception as hypothetical categories into which cultural information will flow—if the latter fits without distending.

Infants by 2½ months watch all the tricks they are shown concerning a ball appearing here and reappearing there with a good deal of interest—if interest is defined by the length of the time they look at the show. But if they are shown a ball reappearing on the other side of an impermeable barrier, as if it had rolled through a solid board, they really have a look. The experimenter seems to feel that infants by this age have preconceptions about what the world is like. If they do, can they also have preferences?

To gain the dynamic for conflict and compromise and tensions and harmonies among the structures, Freud juxtaposed the Pleasure and the Reality principles. Opposing and modifying forces came from transmutations of the id's energies as borrowed or structured by other intrapsychic agencies. Although the attribution of an id by Freud to humankind was to link man with other creatures, Freud may not have considered the full thrust of his idea. Could there be another energy source in humans than the pleasure and appetitive centers of the soma working through the id? And could it be this source working through *its* principle that provides the impetus for the mutative influences and conflicts of humankind? In this paper the Reality principle is reconsidered in terms of its explanatory power relative to a hypothesis of another such source and principle.

This alternative hypothesis yields a view of each of us as being simultaneously a member of a couple and a pair, and of intra-psychic and interpersonal life as a being an ongoing dialectic between the two. The Oedipus complex, for example, is a statement of facts and a very good way of approximating people's experience of the world when they are viewing the world from the point of view of being a member of a couple. But it is not, by the same token, a very good hypothesis when approximating people's experience of the world when they are viewing it from the point of view of being a member of a pair.

METAPSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

From the Project (1895) on, Freud knew he needed an alternative energy source to account for the ebb and flow of dynamic conflict and the offsetting forces of symptom, and later character, formation. If the id were driven by the soma to make cathexes, whence came the other energy source? His answer is well known. The censoring forces (subsequently, in structural theory, the ego) borrowed energy from the id and neutralized it of its purely libidinal and aggressive qualities; left over was a somewhat sublimated source to counter and modify the rough and ready energies of the id based upon the ego's contacts with social reality. Thus there came to be two great principles: the Pleasure

principle and the Reality principle.

As a theory, this is by no means a bad one. It allows the alive body to be the original font; this source of energy is modified into mental energy, thus the id; and the id's energy is further modified into ego energy or attention cathexis, which can be used to attach to, or to counter, or to merge in, mutual modification of its original sources. Out of a monistic thrust, dualism becomes possible, and with dualism all the dynamics and paradoxes of Mind.

Freud (1920) was sufficiently dissatisfied with the secret monism of this formulation to invoke a more fundamental dualism: that of the life and death instincts, a kind of physics that included ideas of rest or nirvana, repetition, entropy, and the return of the parabola to inorganicity. But this Thanatropic energy was clinically impoverished. Surely not every conflict or compromise formation embodied such awesome contenders. So after a bit it dwindled in his own thinking, and only the Kleinian conceptualizations continued with it as a force which had aim and object (Klein 1952). Freud returned to thinking along the lines of the Pleasure and Reality principles.

Within these, we have humankind barely descended from primitivism encountering dangers to its satisfactions, indeed its very survival as an aggregation of individuals, unless each bridles his lusts and accommodates them to the milieu. On the other hand there is the human who is in equal danger of becoming so bridled that he thwarts his lively lusts and turns out to be a repressed, neurasthenic shell. The latter is the work of the superego, which may be equally fanatic and phantasmic, for it too receives its energies only more or less transformed from the id. The ego has, in this model, to mediate between Victoria and the Beast, using its Janus faces to keep itself informed of the interiors of its being while at the same time shrewdly navigating through life's dangers to its enduring and possible pleasures.

That any one of us can identify with that scenario makes the structure and its implied narrative persuasively¹ attractive. Thus despite certain questions, the theory is emotionally an engaging one.

But questions there remain all the same. If the so-called economic question is perhaps the central of these, there are other questions as well. Is there really such a transformation and redirection of energies as Freud posited?

AN ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Freud did not hesitate to adduce originological explanations not available to other students of his day. The Primal Horde, mentioned already, was one; the foundations of his work on Moses and Monotheism was another (he referred to it as “an historical novel”). But, perhaps because he needed a primitive animism for the “boiling cauldron” of the id, and the universality of the Oedipus complex and its taboos, he did not far outreach nineteenth and early twentieth century notions of a kind of fang-and-claw animal nature. Indeed even to impute to humankind—especially to children!—an animal nature was, in Freud’s view, as revolutionary and infuriating to establishment and Victorian narcissism, as Copernicus and Darwin had been before him.²

Now, a hundred years later, we have from ethologists, biologists, anthropologists, and students of infant and child development the basis for a rather different view of our fellow denizens. They have turned out to be rather more like ourselves than different; except perhaps for the virus, they are less destructive to themselves and others than we. And evidence continues to accrue in support of the Darwinian hypothesis that (*pace* teleology) they act as if “their job” were to survive, to select, and to be selected so to reproduce to best advantage for the survival and perpetuation of the species.

As the ecology changes, so change the features penultimately chosen and ultimately available for choice. Indeed, what an outside observer may regard as the bundled features that define a species and who its constituents are, is not necessarily the view held from within: what the observer may think to be a subspecies may be regarded by the membership as a species unto itself. *Homo sapiens*, for example, may exist as a species only in the pages of a taxonomist; to the people involved the race or caste, nation or religion, town or group, may represent the boundary and insigniation. And in given ecologies, even subspecies’ strategies vary. Some involve competition, some cooperation. But the function of these units and strategies appear to serve the purposes of the ultimate survival of whatever mysterious something it is that constitutes the essence of the species.³

But the fact appears to be that whatever its function or functions, this directional thrust is as close to being universal as are the other invariants mentioned.⁴

If that is so—if it is the case that species are driven by a species-specific survival mandate, then this imperative would also have to be in the germ plasm as a proactive force quite like whatever other principles to which they are subject. There would have not merely to be constraints and limits on the quest for sheer pleasure and self

perpetuation. There would also have to be a proactive force or principle in addition to the libido and the drive for egoistic self-preservation—something more or other than coupling and forming a couple: something perhaps in the way of what could be termed bonding, pairing, and forming a group.

This readiness to form adhesions of a noncoupling sort also would, in turn, affect the relationships the twosome might form in respect to a third, fourth (and *n*th others): the twosome in its couple mode might have one relationship, the twosome in its pair (pack, group) mode another. Moreover, whether any two would form a couple or a pair, or to what extent they would form each, might require a modicum of agreement, at least if the interest were to be in pairing. Were the two merely predatorially to use one another as objects, as members of different species routinely do, the species would not last long. (Rather than the survival of the fittest, it would be a matter of the predation of the choicest—of cannibalism, pillage, rape, and murder).

The question then arises whether what is true of other species is also true of our own.⁵

For example, anthropologically speaking, though peoples vary widely, there are no known peoples without a variety of limits, or, depending on one's point of view, opportunities, governing choice. There are no peoples, for example, without a kinship system, marking who is within and who outside of the realm of choice; none without a tribal or other group (e.g., national) identity and boundary; none without an aesthetics; none without a hierarchy of one sort or another. We may wonder whether the function of such levels or boundaries, such as the kinship structure, is, as Levi-Strauss has argued, a matter to permit the barter of brides, or as Freud argued, a derivation of an incest taboo (Freud 1913, Levi-Strauss 1973). But the fact appears to be that whatever its function or functions, it is as close to being universal as are the other invariants mentioned. Does this apparent fact have a bearing in considering man's natural endowments, including the principles on which he can be said to work?

THE QUESTION OF PRINCIPLES REOPENED

Suppose we were to regard this question of the various principles as still open and look again for another stream to the dualism in man's nature, a dualism necessary for the formulations of mutually modifying influences of conflict and compromise and the other phenomena Freud wished to understand dynamically. Suppose we were to posit another dualism, but rather than calling them the Pleasure and the Reality principles, for the moment address them simply as the X and the Y principles.

Let X be characterized as is the Pleasure principle (Lust-Unlust). It wants, and it wants what it wants now, and woe to anyone or anything that stands in its way. It is ruthless and egoistic and wanton.

Let Y also be characterized by wants, but by slightly different wants. Let Y's wants be characterized by man's behest to the rule of nature in which not just the individual wants, but the species also wants, and perforce must speak through the individual, sometimes in counter to the individualistic egoism of X. An X-want might be to pursue selfish pleasures in a life prolonged to do so. A Y-want might be to join the best regiment the armed services has to offer, there to sacrifice one's life if necessary in deference to the wishes of the subspecies or nation to which one belongs.

X and Y together comprise a two-track system, sometimes extending in serene parallel, sometimes overlapping, sometimes congruent, sometimes at oblique or crossing angles. Their wellsprings are, we might hazard, in the same plasm: the libidinal drive for orgiastic pleasure exists in correspondence with the need of the species to propagate itself. But where the libidinous wish may urge one toward the nearest and the most, the Y wish urges waiting for the best and the finest.

What is propinquitous barely needs cognitive discovery. The newborn infant can already make the rooting reflex manifest, turning its mouth toward whatever touches its cheek. In its X-like way it will suckle and feed ruthlessly, indifferent to its mother's fate, if indeed it even bothers to discover a motherly presence in the shadows behind the nipple and breast. But few infants continue to rape, pillage, and steal—to treat mother and other as mere objects put there for their delectation. Somewhere in that same plasm is a readiness to discover and allow for Mother. Somewhere there is an urge to discern bad from good and good from better.

It is difficult to know with any certainty when that urge awakens. To know this one has to know when the discriminatory powers get into working order and when there is the content necessary to inform the decisions. At this writing there is an accumulating body of evidence that the newborn can discriminate its mother's visage and voice within hours after their becoming neonatally acquainted.⁶ But to discern is not necessarily to inform with meaning or value: pigeons can discern eight different human facial expressions on photographs. In the X sense, of course, repletion is the A-Number-One value and meaning: the feedback information comes from within. In the Y sense, the information as to quality has to some degree to do with the species—really, the subspecies, or what I shall also call the Group. It exists as a potential, a category ready to be filled in; but as a potential, as a category, it

exists as a preconception that does not need to be taught but only waits for the Group to give it the information to make it a conception. It may not know *what* constitutes good and bad or better and best, but it knows that there is something to know, something to fit into these categories and blanks on the map. Y may be thought of as being no less greedy and grateful for food for thought than X is for food for the belly: no less greedy and grateful for completion than X is for repletion.

The earmark of humankind as a species, it has been said, is our relative brainpower. Where other species have their choices enprogrammed, and thus may leave the parent or group earlier than we, we can, but also must, stay around to learn what we are to do. Birds appear to know some portion of their subspecies song, needing only to fill in a few blanks; and strange indeed are the songs of birds which are raised with a flock of a kind not their own. Overall, the issue of choice has to be arranged between and within; neighboring species must maintain a difference from one another, and also within the group. When there is relative isolation of closely related groups, the species can allow the characteristics that previously differentiated them from their cousins to drop away in favor of greater distinctions within. Human beings, however, have choosiness together with a wealth of choices to choose among. For us, education and training are not only possible but necessary. Not for (most of) us simply the biggest pair of antlers around, or even the biggest bankroll or highest rank or tallest penthouse on the rightest side of town. Our choosiness is perhaps more subtle, and what is chosen varies from place to place, class to class, peoples to peoples. But have we any less choosiness for all that our choices are so various?

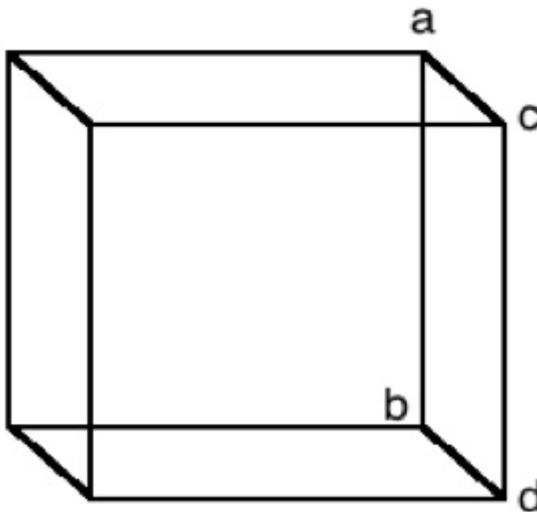
At some point in time, the infant, let us, imagine, goes beyond his libidinous interest in Mother; he actually chooses her. X joins Y. She is now not only a gratifying body to be around, but a quality person, really quite ideal. Fill in Space 1 of Category Y with a valentine heart that says Mom on it. Now as to Space 2, how about what Mom likes, like not having her nipples bitten too hard? In the words of the comedian,² Miss Right is taking over from Miss Right Now.

Let's take that small instance of biting, largely because it so much part of the canons of psychoanalytic theorizing. What have we here? Ego learning the reality that when mother gets bitten once too often, nursing time stops? Ego identifying with mother and being conscience-bitten by mother's mouth as superego? The paranoid position being fashioned out of a reattribution of the authorship of the impulse to sadistically bite, and thereby the introduction of talion anxiety? The paranoid-schizoid giving over to the perception of the whole object—that there is a mother attached to the breast—and with this newfound concern, the introduction of the depressive position.

Ruthlessness surrendering to gratitude and a lovingly generous longing to preserve the good, kind object?

That there is marvelous fertility in the plethora and richness of these explanatory hypotheses must surely go without saying. But they also form something of a hodge-podge. And that weltering quality bespeaks the condition inevitable when not distinguishing between experiences generated when the mother and baby are being members of a Couple and when members of a Pair. As such, it more broadly illustrates the confusion that dogs psychoanalysis when, as a psychology of the Couple, it wishes to allude to matters arising out of the Pair.

The alternative point of view, proposed first by Bion, and which would organize the hypotheses is of the hollow cube where now line AB and now line CD seems forward, as each reverses from figure to ground.⁸



The model is of a socklike affair, where the substance remains constant while what is outermost and innermost, dominant or recessive, changes.

Thus in the earliest days of infancy, one must suppose now a alternation of the streams of X-wants and 7-wants with now a merger, now a divergence, with X still wanting to chew and bite and couple ruthlessly, while Y wants equally passionately to select Mother for longer term Pairing and, as Others are discovered, for Grouping. I say “equally passionately” to stay well away from ideas concerning a neutering of energy or the development of ambivalence or the establishment of mental structures. I am suggesting that libido found, and then choosiness agreed. It does not always: the ideal may embrace what the libido does not. But when the quest for the good and the best has lighted upon its objective, the libido may have to go elsewhere or surrender. Often indeed it goes with. The Right and the Best release all the love of spring and summer, as does the crown of antlers the procreative passions of the doe. In our example, however, not only has her baby selected Mother, but he has thrown in his lot with her. He has not only, in X, taken her as his object, he has, in Y, taken her as a leading member of a group of two. Love me, love my dogma. And he does.

In this, we have a further aspect in the characterization of Y. It seeks quality and makes it a part of how and why it chooses objects and objectives. But in doing so, in filling in the empty categories with criteria, it identifies itself with the tastes and choices of the group. Y, being species-specific, has the group in mind, or at any rate is ready to have it in mind. The activity of the species is the survival of the species through the sending of the finest and fittest into and down the gene pools of the generations. It begins with selecting what the fittest and finest are, it protects them, and ultimately it propagates them. Y is choosy by nature. X seeks *repletion*, Y *completion*. By necessity, therefore, they have two different time structures, Y waiting to find and choose for later, X interested in the here, now, and often—Miss Right and Miss Right Now.

Y, then, delays A's gratifications with its fastidiousness and longer view; left to its own devices, Y might procrastinate choice forever if it weren't for intemperate nudging from X.

X, it is turning out, is interested in differences, particularly reciprocal differences, as between mouth and breast and vagina and penis; Y with alliances which involve having things in common, particularly the finer things. X is interested in coupling with the Other, Y in identifying and pairing with it or grouping with them. X chooses to take pleasure in even the smallest differences, Y overlooks even the largest ones in order to find or fashion having as much in common as it takes to feel at One with them. But when Y prevails and groups with the others X might have wished to use libidinally, X has its turn. For X, augmented in fact or in fancy, with the host of all-for-one/one-for-all Y has fashioned out of what was to X an aggregate of different possibilities, has now the

prerogatives, given only to the crème de la crème, of enforcing its wish or will upon the objects the group deems suitable for use by X. X insists on this.

If X has to give up its object in whole or in part because at Y's behest they have become part of Us, X insists on the quid quo pro of there being Non-Us objects for its pleasure or aggressive employ. If there are none, if the immediate object world consists only of people or aspects of people linked in Y, X will force a breakdown into a subpairing or subgrouping which, when effected, will cast forth objects fit for coupling. This sort of subspeciation accommodates both X's need for pleasure of its sort and Y's need for choosing the finest and fittest from which to give and take selective advantage. Thus a twosome can agree, as a Pair, in F, to enjoy coupling within the bounds of that twosome, or not, as weaning traditions or incest prohibitions may dictate. But no matter the behavior, no matter how wanton, aggressive, or concupiscent it may be, there is a cusp of Y-ness around it: the Pair has agreed even that perhaps the Couple may kill one another.

That such lust is blessed by the Pair, moreover, permits degrees of license that the superego, based as it is on the couple and triangle, might otherwise prevent. The Pair and Group work through shame, the Couple in its configuration of the oedipal triangle, through guilt. Shame bespeaks the ideal; guilt the internalized danger from wrongdoings that are transgressions against the rivalrous Father or Mother. Sullivan (1953) shrewdly observed that the way out of crippling guilt that might otherwise bring madness is for the child to find an group alternative to his parental group and superego. Thus a youngster as a member of an actual or reference group can, for example, shoplift a store when that same child as part simply of a Couple could not feel free to do so.

Y has yet another aspect to it beyond the need to choose not well, but wisely. It is to be among the chosen—the selected. The latter conjoins the X-stream wish to take one's pleasures at no matter who's expense by introducing the desire to prevail over one's rivals. But, inherently, it is a wish to compete successfully. Part of such success depends on how one fares as the object of others' choices. This urge (or, as we shall see, necessity) is approximated by the narcissistic endeavor to find favor, first in one's own eyes, then as one is seen through the eyes of others—this is “others” in the sense Kohut (1972) uses the term “self objects”; and, finally as one is indeed seen through the eyes of one's own chosen ones. (As is well known, it is possible to get mired at any point in this progression.)

The necessity I refer to follows from the apprehension that one will not prevail, that one is not among the

Select, that is, those selected. Not all of the actual or potential litter are destined to survive: selection begins early. Klein identified the complex experience children have at “prevailing” over their own unborn rivals (cf Klein 1945). (I have myself written of the dread of people who as infants were not assured in some way that their success in gaining birth and beyond was meant; that they are not imposters: Boris 1987)

Like others among the creatures, man is biologically a social animal; he is tribal, territorial, hierarchical. All these qualities exist because they are required in order that choice and selection can be made. Y exists as the chooser and hence the inhibitor and the releaser of X. The dimly surmised premonition that there is a Y that goes two ways is, I think, the source of dread attributed to the Death instinct. Many are called, but few are chosen.

From this point of view, Y functions with X very like the Reality principle is thought to function in respect to the Pleasure principle. Each augments and inhibits the other in a ceaseless dynamic.

Interpersonally, this dynamic modulates the extent to which the Other is chosen as a SelfUs-Same person and how much as an Other-Them-Different person. In juxtaposition with this parsing, there are for X seemly and unseemly choices with whom to celebrate its well-known lust for reciprocally celebrating differences. Thus every relationship is compounded in some measure of identifications and differentiations. There may be great harmony between self and other in sorting out how much of X and how much of Y may come into their relationship. And, of course, for each there may be the usual irretrievable conflict between having what one wants and wanting what one has.

One man’s reality may be another man’s nonsense. Reality, in any case, can only be dimly apprehended. Freud’s idea of the primary and secondary processes, the one a grossly self-serving creature, driven by wish and craven by fear, the second, a mature soul attuned to empirical and logical pursuits, is but one way of sorting matters out. Another may be more pluralistic. There is reason to think, for example, that people need both fictive and factual apprehensions of the world in a shifting balance, each at once to contrast and contain the other and to complement and tell the other part (Boris 1989). Be that as it may, can there be anyone anywhere, whether outside the head man’s hut or in front of the TV, who can listen to the evening news and not marvel at the bloody-mindedness and wrongheadedness of his fellow man?

But to the extent that it may not be, the final difficulty with a Reality principle is the mentocentrism of the idea of reality itself (cf Boris 1989).

Let us now rid ourselves of this X and Y nomenclature and try instead to find names for these principles. There is no reason to change the name of X from the Pleasure principle, for it describes the nature of egoistic desire. But Y is different. Its great urge is vectored toward a kind of investment in the potential, in the not-yet, in the yet-to-be, in time and possibility of generations to come. If X is the desire for pleasure now, and devil take the nextmost, perhaps Y is rooted in a fierce, if often unwitting, hope of and for the future, the thing that got us here and kept a here for us to get to—and may yet get our children's children to a there that is still here. Can we not call the correlative to the Pleasure principle the *Selection* principle, with *hope as its manifest, premonitory emotion*? Can we not say that preconceptions, and later conceptions, of what is to be hoped for restrain desire, as the desire for gratification for me, now, constrains hope; that out of hopelessness springs desire and out of desire, new hope? Can we not suppose that the great struggle between *repletion* and *completion* lies within the genetic endowment for the dynamic of not all other species save our own, but of our own as well?

SOME CONSIDERATIONS

This proposal plainly presents some of the same difficulties that Plato's ideas regarding the Ideal and Kantian concepts of the Noumenon have done. And, being based on Darwinian concepts of Natural Selection and the Survival of the Species, it poses those unsettling issues of teleology as well. And of course it re-poses all the difficulties that Freud posed in speaking of a Pleasure principle, derived from the soma but represented psychically as a set of drives and urges that demand and imbue attention.

Plato's thinking concerned a hypothesis of an ideal to which all things really were only approximations. The ideal was at rest; there was nowhere further it need go; it was fully evolved. The real, being only approximations of this ideal, were in need ceaselessly of change: as they changed they became more true, more beautiful, and more enduring. Kant's Noumenon is also unapprehensible; it is a category that phenomena more or less adequately fill out and realize. Interestingly, Darwin's Survival has much in common with both Plato's ideal and Kant's noumenon. Species are supposed to realize their term of being alive and, in that sense, actual, by perpetuating themselves unto future generations. Their destiny is to change and adapt selectively so that primarily the very best of their genes are sent forward into the gene pools of the generations to come. Though Darwin of course does not say so, it is as if there will come to be an evolutionary condition so nearly perfect as to endure forever. This may be thought of as an Edenesque version of an eternal afterlife. Meanwhile, through selection and selectivity, each species further refines itself for its work of penultimate survival.

ON NARCISSISM AS BEING CHOSEN

By supposing that something of what Darwin thought to be true of other creatures might be true of mankind as well, one would install a restless sort of preoccupation with choices alongside of egoistic hedonism. Miss Right Now would contend with Miss Right and the need to select and to be selected would conflict with, or at least moderate, choices that might otherwise be made propinquously, opportunistically, or randomly.

Psychoanalytic theory has *of course* attended to the conflicts and compromises of pleasure the ego encounters. From the interpersonal school, led by Sullivan (1953), we have seen the essential function of affiliative and identificatory experiences play in the very viability of the ego or self. From those, like Kohut (1968), who have focused on narcissism, we have seen the vicissitudes of what I am calling the need to have the love of self shared by others. Both of these writers have addressed the need for the Pleasure principle to be modified in order to extend our understanding of the range and depth of interpersonal experiences. Freud too spoke of narcissism, saying: “Love for oneself knows only one boundary—love for others” (1921, p. 102).

But the idea that there is inherent in the very germ plasm of the species not alone an imperative to be chosen—but, *if not, to stand aside to, perhaps even to die for, those who are*—may put “narcissism” in a somewhat different light. For in this perspective, the need to enhance one’s self over others, and indeed at their expense, is an urge no more inclined to make itself known and felt than the opposite one of deferring egoistic narcissistic gratification to the well-being of the many. If one may contest with all as to who is to be chosen and so have the rights to first choice *by or among* the potential mates and other wealth that accrues to the winner, one may not contest to the detriment of the winner, but must, if anything, sacrifice one’s self for the group.² (The expectation is that in turn the group will lend its powers, not least its strength in numbers, to assist the Cinderellas should a Prince not come.¹⁰)

These two vectors are subject to coalescence, conflict, and compromise, but are in continual dynamic tension. If it weren’t for the urgency of the pleasure principle, one might wait forever, studying the possibilities of becoming an even better bridesmaid, awaiting the aggrandizement of being the choice of the perfect swain. Yet, if it weren’t for the choosiness of the Selection principle the fittest might not be discovered and, as a result, not be available for being selectively chosen. This would leave matters to the egoistic lust of the chooser, with nothing else to drive the engine of interaction.

Desire and the feeling of satiety represent the pleasure end of the Pleasure principle, and frustration and deprivation are its special pain. These experiences are sensuous and make themselves known as such to each individual (though they may be so painful that steps are taken to unknow¹¹ the fact or the feeling of them).

The Selection principle of course must also make itself felt or else it would have no motivational force within the individual. It makes itself manifest in feelings of hope and elation or despair and dread, in ideas of idealism and purpose or of confusion and meaninglessness. There are what were once called “existential” experiences or crises, in which the pleasure of simply *being* either contrasts or comports with the need to *become*.

Thus the any-which-way-and-how, the polymorphic quest for release, relief, and then satiety of the Pleasure principle plays in a key entirely different from the push to wait for better, other or more. Freud spoke of this in his aphorism “Better gets in the way of good.” In Winnicott’s language, “good enough” represents a compromise between hope and desire, a bonding made jittery and tenuous if any tilt in the balance of two constituents to the compact should take place.

The need to be chosen is half of the Selection principle, the other half being the obligation to be choosy and to garner choices to match. It is the former that is easily mistaken for narcissism of the sort Freud described when he said that out of disappointments with the world of others, the object world, the ego turns to itself as its source of love and gratification. But the appellation *narcissistic* is often assigned to people who are thought to be “too” choosy.

The attributes that enable one to be chosen can come out of “mutant” qualities, which is to say the quality of being different and distinctive. Or they can come out of being or having the best of whatever quality is preferred by the centrist group (often, of course, both are involved). The thought that one possesses these or can attain them is a source for optimism and ebullience. The fear that one may not produces the opposite response, a fear for one’s very life. For at any moment one may be un-selected, included out: aborted.¹²

On the other hand, when as yet unrealized hopes appear to be taking shape and form, their presence triggers desire. The clearer the presence of the choice one hoped for, the readier and more ardent the desire. But when desire persists in the absence of hoped-for attributes, that desire can produce hatred of the other or self-loathing of murderous or suicidal proportions, as when prostitutes get beaten up by their despairing clients or people mutilate the organs of their desire.

The self does not merely represent itself; it represents the species. And as such, what might be all right for the self may not be all right when the group is concerned. Some people are able to distinguish between private and self occasions and public and self-as-representative-of-the-group occasions. Behind closed doors they are able to think thoughts and perform deeds that they could not possibly make public without the greatest shame. But there are those for whom there is no off-duty; they cannot escape the shame of the group, wherever they are (Morrison 1989).

ON CHOOSING AND CHOICE

The array of characteristics available for choice indicates both the degree of the choosiness and the competition for being chosen. But these characteristics are of little use unless they are regarded as holding possibility for the destiny of the species. Thus there is a great gulf between both distinctiveness and deviancy and choosiness, on the part of the would-be chosen, and snobbishness, on the part of the potential chooser.

In the face of such drift in both parameters, some species have the choices preprogrammed. But this leaves them inflexible when time to accommodate to different environmental conditions come along. To be sure, further selection will presumably rectify that, especially if there is the Joker of the mutant gene in the pack. But humankind has bred itself predispositions rather than explicit imperatives. Its categorical nature is such that the categories are but half full, awaiting experience and socialization to fill them to the brim.

The categories we use have to do with the biggest and the best—but this can be penis or bust size.¹³ And it can range, analogically, perhaps, to the “size” of money, territory, rank and influence, and the like. (Power is aphrodisiac, Kissinger is quoted as reporting.) Our preferences as to particulars await discovery; but the predilections arrive prenatally with the germ plasm.

In the face of the array of the variables and the complexity involved in ordering them for purposes of choosing or being chosen, there appear to be two somewhat paradoxical trends. One is that like seeks like. The other is that like seeks unlike.

In the former, unlike is accommodated by superiority, by having more of the same; in the latter it is subsumed by having more and better of what is different. An extreme of the former may be said to express itself in the preference for the homo, as in homosexuality, and on the complementary side a sort of xenophobia. Homophobia would be the extreme of the drift toward the attraction of opposites, which on its positive axis might lean toward

acceptance of the mutant (or mystic).¹⁴

So far I have dealt with what might be called active efforts at selection—self-perfection in the service of being among the chosen, selection of the best and most beautiful to enhance self and species. But there is a passive side to selection, too—what might be encapsulated in the term *salvation*.

Each species is prey to another, including itself at those times when subspeciation takes place. The enduring tensions over birth control, abortion, and infanticide reflect the power of this in regard to being individually permitted life itself by the doyens of the species. Then comes the matter of protection from outside the pair—of child abuse or sexual misuse or castration or defeminization. Finally comes the matter of protection from intraspecies tensions—of what has sometimes been called Social Darwinism, where entire groups (e.g., natives, castes, underclasses, or specialized groups like the military) are used at the convenience or to enhance the survival of others.

This specialization, consisting in a division of labor, in which some till and some teach, each according to their abilities and the needs of the group, is indeed a species-enhancing procedure. At one end of it is rank parasitism, where units of a species exist entirely for the use of others. Analogies can be found to social organisms like insect colonies and, for that matter, the human body itself in which cells specialize on a feedback system according to the particular distributions of specialist cells at a given time. Thus among ants, when the queen is gravid, she emits pheromones that appear to keep all other females in the colony sterile. And in humans when sufficient cells of one sort, say cerebral tissue, have embryologically been formed, cells that do not yet have a defined anatomy and function are turned off from further evolution into the cerebral tissue parts and instead become open to morphological evolution into other sorts of brain cells as yet insufficient in quantity, as signaled chemically. These, to be sure, are analogies, nothing more, but they may point to a system in which the two parameters, like and unlike, are insufficient guides. Thus subspecialization within a cohesive and integral system may be a hair's breadth from a heterogeneity, in which the system, however well synthesized, is contrived rather than integral, such as a social system may be as compared to a biological system.

A system of slavery, for example, may represent such modeling of the social upon the biological; but it is in fact a division of labor between members of the same species and quite different from the keeping of creatures (cattle, dogs, etc.) of another. But the members of a servile class or caste may, and often do, when the economy of the given organization can evolve no further,¹⁵ force the whole into new alignments of specialized units. Taken too far, this

process of commensurate activities for commensurate gain disintegrates into parasitism, where the value of the one is merely to keep the other alive and flourishing, no matter the former's fate. These are the seedlings that are thinned, the branches that are pruned, the lives enshaded by the heights of other lives. Yet to those involved it is not always clear whether they are being engaged in parasitism or in symbiosis: it was many months before officers were fagged in Vietnam; many years before revolutions and counterrevolutions take place; many decades before people emigrate, as if from the old hive, elsewhere to form a new colony.

In short, then, the Pair and the Couple are states of mind, depending on whether the object or event in view is experienced as unique or one more of the same. And depending on which state of mind is prevailing, certain emotions come to the fore while others recede. Given that it is responsive to motivations driven by the Selection principle, the pair has a welter of emotions having to do with display, adequacy, and belonging. Admiration and humiliation, confidence and shame, envy and selfpossession, belonging and anomie, outrage, mania and depression, panic and righteousness, and, ultimately, hope and despair, are some of these. When the state of mind of the couple comes to the fore, propelled by the Pleasure principle, the sensual emotions come forward with it—desire and deprivation, gratitude and jealousy, ruthlessness and guilt, hatred and longing, sadness, anger and sorrow—the pleasure of satiety or the pains of loss.

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Notes

[1](#) Anthropomorphically

[2](#) Of Copernicus, placing us not in the center of our universe, but upon "a tiny speck in a world system of a magnitude hardly conceivable"; of Darwin, a revolution that "robbed man of his peculiar privilege of having been specially created, and relegated him to a

descent from the animal world”; of Freud’s own, “endeavoring to prove to the ‘ego’ of each one of us that he is not even master of his own house, but that he must remain content with the veriest scraps of information about what is going on unconsciously in his own mind.”

[3](#) Lewis Thomas, in his book *Lives of a Cell* (New York: Viking Press, 1974), notes that individual cells appear in some sense to recognize like and unlike, a phenomenon much involved in tissue and organ transplants from one person to another. Strictly speaking, a species is defined by the range of creatures that can reproduce one with another.

[4](#) In the matter of function, *original* and *current* functions may vary; selection is opportunistic; features selected for one thing may evolve into another. Feathers, for example, may have evolved for purposes of improved thermal regulation but survived due to their ability to enable the flight of birds (Gould 197, p.122)

[5](#) Or vice versa. The Darwinian unit is the classic sense taken to be the individual body, not the gene “below” or the species “above”. But since not just morphology, but behaviors, are heritable, it can be that different species are selected along somewhat different lines, particularly by dint of the behaviors involved. (See also Gould 1983, pp. 173-174)

[6](#) See, for example, Beebe and Lachman 1988.

[7](#) Robin Williams, in his appearance at Carnegie Hall.

[8](#) The “facing profiles” and the “vase” do as well for those more familiar with them.

[9](#) As I shall show in subsequent publications, the deepest envy of the have-nots is directed toward the right of the haves to survive and to flourish. These (“Unconscious Envy,” “More of the Same,” “About Time,” and “Look-see”) are forthcoming in *Envy* (1994).

[10](#) “Man, you put on that uniform, you know you never be beat.” – Magic Johnson, L.A. Lakers.

[11](#) Bion’s minus K, or what might be also called K.O., as in: it was kayoed in the third round.

[12](#) Is it a wonder pro-life people fear pro-choicers!

[13](#) “Has there ever been an analysis in which penis size did not come up?”—Roy Schafer, P. C.

[14](#) Bion remarks on this in his Chapter, “The Mystic and the Group” (1970); Freud, of course, understood that a bisexuality was endemic to us as a species.

[15](#) See Gould (1980) for a discussion of such a crisis model of change.