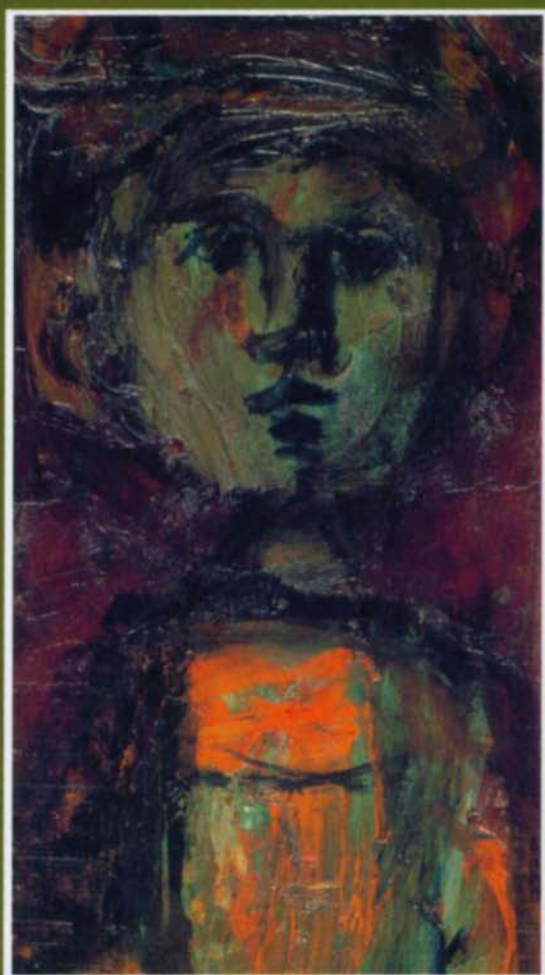


NEVILLE SYMINGTON

NARCISSISM
A NEW THEORY

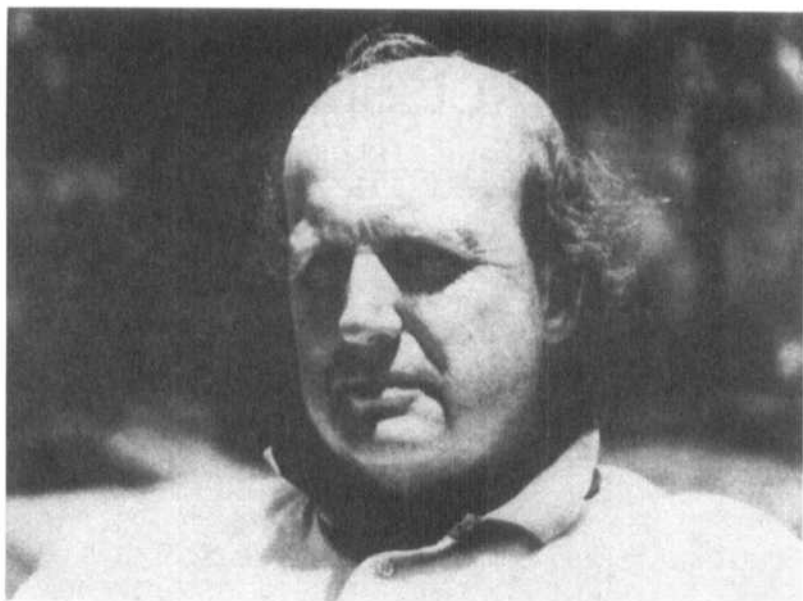
Foreword by James S. Grotstein



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NARCISSISM

A New Theory



Neville Symington

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London
KARNAC BOOKS

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For Andrew

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FOREWORD

James S. Grotstein

Neville Symington approaches the well-trodden subject of narcissism and offers us fresh insights from his long clinical experience with patients suffering from this disorder. The camera angle he employs is both unusual and enlightening. He has come to understand the narcissistic subject, not only from the well-known Kleinian instinctual grandiosity/manic defence standpoint or from the trauma-deficit conceptions of Fairbairn, Winnicott, Balint, and Kohut, but also from the unique perspective of profound ontological insecurity. Ecumenical in his outlook, though trained in the British Independent School of which he is a senior member, he looks at this disorder from what might today be called an existential point of departure. The infant/child becomes narcissistically disordered by making an unconscious choice, either towards the *lifegiver* (its authenticity or spontaneity) or to its disavowal and the use of magical pretence in order to evade psychic reality and to avoid external reality.

I understand this *lifegiver* to be an internal, phantasmal, transitional-like object that is composed of aspects of the self and of the external life-supporting object. It is an object that

personifies the "act of faith" that Bion, Lacan, and Winnicott describe, according to Eigen. Having partially abandoned the *lifegiver*, the hapless narcissistic subject becomes divided into dissociated sub-selves or alter egos that conflict with one another, defy integration, and forfeit their sense of a spontaneous agency of initiative.

This is a skeletal summary of the author's theme. First, I should like to sketch some highlights in the history of the concept of narcissism in order to help establish the significance of Symington's noteworthy contribution. In the continuing stream of historic psychoanalytic transformations, one can observe its tendency to flow in a series of dialectics, privileging first one conception and then another, followed by a brief reconciling synthesis, and then another series of dialectics, each series constituting a structure of binary oppositions. The history of the development of the concept of narcissism was greatly influenced by this dialectical course, as I hope to demonstrate. Psychoanalysis had begun with the dialectic of unconscious traumatic memory versus consciousness (in which unconsciousness was created by the censorship), which soon became a conflict between System Ucs versus System Cs; within this latter category arose the dialectic between libido and repression, and then later between the libidinal instincts and the ego instincts.

His findings on narcissism caused Freud (1914c) to abandon that dialectic, and in the meantime he shifted his attention to his metapsychological papers. In that work, however, he left us with the conception of narcissism as (1) a stage that occurred following autoerotism but prior to anaclitic object choice; (2) a primary narcissism that was a state of *non-object relatedness*; (3) a secondary narcissism that predicated a return of the ego from object relatedness with the purpose of reinstating primary narcissism. This state of secondary narcissism constituted object relationships of the narcissistic type, according to Freud. As "the shadow of the object falls on the ego", the shadow of this shadow (identifications) is to fall once again, in turn, on objects in the outer world—that is, external objects are to be treated as if they are aspects of the self.

The next step in the development of the concept of narcissism was its being considered to be a moiety in the internal

world of the melancholic. "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917e [1915]) was to become Freud's profoundest contribution to object relations theory and the template and provenance for the later contributions of Melanie Klein and W. R. D. Fairbairn. In addition, it continued some of the themes left unanswered in "On Narcissism: An Introduction" by positing a dialectic between object relations and narcissism. In "Mourning and Melancholia" Freud had discovered that when an individual cannot tolerate the loss of an object (actually functioning as a part-object), he is able to deny this loss in unconscious phantasy by internalizing the lost object. In addition, the object is split into two different part-objects, one assigned to an identificatory relationship with the ego ideal "as a gradient in the ego" and the other identifying with the ego itself. Freud then went on to say that the former structure employs a maximum of sadism towards the latter, which maintains a relationship with it masochistically. Nevertheless, the loss is partially successfully denied, at the cost of an inner melancholia (persecution). Thus, the interaction of the four entities (two part-objects and two part-egos) constitutes a state of secondary narcissism, and their interrelationship constitutes an internalized narcissistic object relationship.

The splitting and subsequent distribution of the egos and objects allows for an understanding of the psychodynamics of melancholia as being constituted by a sadomasochistic relationship between two (really four) internal structures, which also constitute the dialectics of *object relations and narcissism*. Klein (1940) was to derive her theory of the persecutory anxiety of the paranoid-schizoid position ("pre-melancholia") and the depressive anxiety of the depressive position from this internalized dynamic structure, whereas Fairbairn (1940) was to view Freud's narcissistic-melancholic paradigm as a testimony to the schizoid condition, from which he elaborated the six components of his "endopsychic structure".

Put another way, Freud pioneered much of our understanding of the concepts of narcissism and object relations, but he never sufficiently clarified the distinction between narcissism as an object relationship and as a non-object relationship (primary narcissism). His concept of psychosis, we recall, was one of a *narcissistic neurosis*—that is, one in which the cathexis

of the object is withdrawn back onto the self, and thus an object relationship no longer exists. It was for this reason that he postulated that narcissistic neuroses, unlike the psycho-neuroses, were unanalysable. This issue has plagued psychoanalysis and was in part responsible for the great debates between the British object relations schools (who believed that the infant is object-seeking from the beginning) and the orthodox/classical school, which believed that the infant was non-object-seeking while it was in its autistic-narcissistic caul—and could not seek objects until it had “hatched”. Yet throughout the controversies, the arguments were between the importance of *objects* versus *drives*. *Narcissism*, in its own right, though addressed in derivative forms, especially by Fairbairn and Winnicott, remained in eclipse.

In the background was another dialectic that was to become much more prominent later—that between ego defect and psychic conflict, the descendants of which became the deficit-privileging theories of Fairbairn, Winnicott, Balint, Bowlby, Sullivan, and Kohut, whereas Klein, in an odd alliance with ego psychology, maintained the primacy of conflict theory.

In the early days of the British object relations movement, one could observe a dialectic that was to have vast ramifications for psychoanalysis. While Klein, on the one hand, and Fairbairn and Winnicott, on the other, dealt with “object relations”, it ultimately devolved that the roots of the current theory of narcissism, first developed by Freud, were to emerge more clearly. To Klein, narcissism (she rarely used the term and did not formally address the concept) could be understood as the permanent internalized phantasies of objects with which the infant introjectively identifies, and they reveal *how* he has transformed the perception of his objects via the initial schizoid and manic defences. In other words, according to Klein, the infant *is* and *becomes* what he believes he does and has done to his objects—and *how he defends against this awareness (manic defences)*. This supposition is based upon the concept of putative intentionality or subjective authorship of will (projective identification). I mention this point because it is emphasized—and properly so, I believe—by Symington. The other theories—Fairbairn’s and Winnicott’s, and even Kohut’s—are shy on unconscious intentionality and seem to privilege the

non-dialectical relationship between the helpless infant and the unfavourable environment of objects as a trauma-deficit theory. Thus, Klein seemed to become the ombudsman for the external object (principally the breast), and she patrolled its putative misuse by the infant; on another level, however, she confirmed Freud's (and Abraham's) intuitions about narcissistic object relations by positing the connection between putative intentionality and psychic phantasy (principally projective identification). In her hands the relatively static entities of Freud's (1917e [1915]) and Abraham's (1924) portraits of the internal world of the narcissist (who could not mourn but only lose himself with the object or deny the loss altogether) came dynamically alive.

Fairbairn and Winnicott (as well as Balint, Bowlby, Sullivan, Kohut, and others), on the other hand, became ombudsmen for the infant. But it was finally Kohut (1971) who memorialized this infant ombudsmanship as the "independent developmental line of the self" (independent of object relations, i.e. the oedipal phase and complex). Kohut's innovative pronouncement, based as it was in large measure on the contributions of Fairbairn and Winnicott, became a veritable manifesto in the United States. Just as the women's liberation movement inaugurated the age of female consciousness, so Kohut, aided by infant-development and child-abuse research, enfranchised the infant and child in a way that had been unprecedented in human history. The age of "normal narcissism" and normal narcissistic entitlement had arrived. Simply put, it is the infant's and child's right and entitlement that its parents are obliged to proffer at the very least the minimum requisite "selfobject" soothing, mirroring, monitoring, attuning, and idealizable companionship ("twinship") to allow the infant/child to develop a sense of self-cohesion.

In more recent times, the concept of narcissism has been revived because of its comparison with borderline disorders that constitute some of the more common primitive mental disorders. Rosenfeld (1987) restated the importance of the concept of object relations (which Freud had both alluded to and, paradoxically, refuted), re-invoked Freud's earlier emphasis on the importance of the ego ideal in narcissism, and conceived of a characteristic internal object—a chimerical montage or

monster, one might say—that was constructed of the ego, the ego ideal, and the “mad omnipotent self”. When it was operant in the clinical situation, Rosenfeld termed it “narcissistic omnipotent object relations”. Kernberg (1984) later borrowed Rosenfeld’s image and conceived his own “monster”, one that characterizes a “pathological grandiose self” and is constituted by (1) the real self, (2) the ideal self, and (3) the ideal object representation.

There is yet another aspect of the history of narcissism that requires discussion—namely, the mysterious relationship to *hysteria*, the neurosis that dominated nineteenth-century psychiatry and became the very provenance of psychoanalysis, but which has been eclipsed in the latter half of this century, having gone the way of all neuroses, yielding to the current rise in the popularity of the personality disorders. A bland indifference, a metaphoric “tunnel vision”, the surface nature of their affects, and the shallow and manipulative nature of their object relations seem to characterize the personalities Symington had in mind, particularly Anna Karenina, the tragic anti-heroine of Tolstoy’s novel.

Symington now offers yet another dialectic—that between choosing or forswearing the *lifegiver*. In the former case one achieves a healthy mental foundation, in the latter, a pathological narcissism. The author’s main thrust seems to be that the balance between a healthy state of mind and pathological narcissism rests on the way the traumata of narcissistic injuries had been dealt with in infancy—whether the infant surrendered to them and became prisoner, as it were, to a malevolent saboteur within (shades of Fairbairn), or whether he chose to hold on to the gift of life (personified as the *lifegiver*) and maintained a sense of faith. One is reminded here of many authors, not the least of which are Klein and her followers, who so painstakingly focus on the issue of separation and the “gap”, but also Eigen (1981), as mentioned earlier, and his contribution to the “Area of Faith in Winnicott, Lacan, and Bion”.

I myself have independently approached this theme, one that is so central to infant development and psychoanalytic technique, by invoking the concept of the psychology of *innocence* and of the *loss of innocence* (Grotstein, in prepara-

tion a, in preparation b). Klein, Fairbairn, and Winnicott agree that the infant seems to split his objects and his ego in the face of persecution (Klein) and/or trauma (Fairbairn and Winnicott). Klein emphasizes the depressive and pre-depressive (persecutory) aspects, Fairbairn the schizoid quality of this splitting, and Winnicott the formation of the "true and false selves". In other words, from the perspective of innocence one can say that Freud and Klein regard the instinctually driven infant as potentially disingenuous and therefore *not* innocent but capable of establishing innocence as the result of a successful outcome of the Oedipus complex (Freud) and/or the achievement and transcendence of the depressive position. Fairbairn, Winnicott, and Kohut can be thought to conceive that critical trauma and deprivation can cause a child, who is initially innocent, to lose his innocence and become secondarily disingenuous. Winnicott (1956) highlights this loss of innocence in his "Antisocial Tendency".

The concept of primal *innocence* and its fate first came to our attention in William Blake's (1789–1794) *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. There he suggested that the infant possesses a primal innocence that is tested in the "forest of experience" (life), and if he is successful and remains uncompromised, he transcends into a higher innocence. Associated with innocence is the bond with an object, the nature of which amounts to a *covenant*, whereas the consequence of the loss of one's innocence is a default condition in which one feels bound by a Faustian bargain (Blomfield, 1985) to a diabolical internal object and always experiences being influenced and manipulated by the intentionality or will of that object, much as in the early stages of Tausk's (1919) "influencing machine". One has lost one's spontaneity—a point that runs like Ariadne's thread through Symington's noteworthy and innovative contribution.

Symington's concept of the acceptance or rejection of the *lifegiver* overarches and integrates the conflict/deficit debate by averring that the narcissist has made a choice *because of his response to trauma*. By stating it in this way, the author pays heed to his belief and to that of the trauma-deficiency school that narcissistic disorders always emerge from a trau-

matic origin, but it is the individual response to it by the subject that determines whether or not a narcissistic default or forfeiture of innocence and of the true self will occur.

In citing the work of Frances Tustin, the author is making yet another conceptual bridge—that between autism and narcissism. We have seen that Klein conceives of narcissism as essentially manic, whereas Fairbairn considered it schizoid. Tustin's noteworthy researches into the autistic disorders have helped us to apply some of her ideas to the narcissist. Thus, we can see that, like the autistic child, the narcissist uses the object, not in a normal sharing relationship for normal dependency and interdependency, but for a manipulative, parasitic relationship in which the object is to be seduced and controlled so as to allow the autistic/narcissistic subject to remain omnipotent and protectively encapsulated. Like the autistic child, the narcissist hates object relations but is stuck with them and so has to manipulate them to their pathological needs—and has to suffer the consequences. They hate being alone, they hate needing their objects, but they deny their feelings of envy by purloining in phantasy those aspects of the object they need so as to bypass envy and gratitude. They can never escape the deep feelings of shame that emerge when they realize how unintegrated they are within themselves.

Symington's concept of the *lifegiver* in its role in normal and abnormal narcissism constitutes a unique and integrating perspective on this entity and deserves serious consideration.

PREFACE

This short book came about in the following way. About three and a half years ago, I started to work on the subject of Psychoanalysis and Religion, and it came to me quite early in that research that the connecting link between the two disciplines was narcissism. I then realized that I did not know what narcissism was, so I set myself the task of thinking on the subject for twenty minutes every day. This thinking was done with the word processor in front of me, so I typed as I thought. As I thought and typed, a strange creature began to evolve in my mind. By the end of a year, this endeavour had radically altered my understanding of psychoanalysis. So the project had achieved its objective. It never once occurred to me that the beneficiary of this mental reconstruction could be anyone other than myself.

Then I was sitting at a committee meeting of the Sydney Institute for Psychoanalysis, in which we were trying to decide what lectures and workshops we could offer the following year, when the timid thought came to my mind that perhaps I could offer this inchoate thinking on narcissism as a series of lectures. I went home and turned on the word processor, and I

saw that I had, in substance, sufficient material for ten lectures. In my thinking I had luckily grouped my thoughts under headings, and each of these divisions of subject matter became the substance of a lecture. When at a subsequent committee meeting I voiced this as a suggestion, I had the whole-hearted support of my colleagues.

The lectures were, I believe, a success. They were given in a medium-sized seminar room at the Sydney Institute's premises. With 24 people, the seminar had reached maximum capacity, and so I repeated the series the following term, and again we had the same number of participants. Giving the lectures a second time enabled me to clarify further some of the concepts. Most of my writing has developed from the spoken word, and the feed-back I have had is that what appeals to people is simplicity of expression. So, by the time I was giving the second series of lectures, I had already conceived the idea of transferring the spoken word onto the written page, and, with that in view, I recorded the lectures on audio-tape. I was working on another book, and I did not have the time to edit this material, but I was lucky enough to find the services of an editor who worked hard to make what I had spoken ready for the written page, without, I believe, damaging the personal style of lecturer to audience.

Most, but not all, of the people attending the lectures were psychotherapists; I did not require of them any prior knowledge of the psychoanalytic literature on narcissism. The only book I asked them to read was Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*,* which nearly all of them had done before the lectures started. Except at one point, I eschewed direct discussion of how to convert the theory being discussed into effective therapeutic interpretation—because you cannot tell a psychotherapist what to say. I hoped, instead, that some of the things would gestate and in the fullness of time give birth to new interpretations.

*Although the Penguin translation of this work, excerpts from which appear in this volume, is titled *Anna Karenin*, the more familiar form, *Anna Karenina*, has been retained throughout.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to thank the Sydney Institute for Psychoanalysis for so generously sponsoring these lectures and those mental health professionals who attended them. Some very valuable suggestions were made, which have been incorporated into the text of the book. After each lecture, I left some time for discussion; some of the points raised are now part and parcel of the text. I should like to thank Gillian Hewitt, who edited the whole manuscript and without whose help the book could not have been. I should also like to thank Elaine Menzies for transcribing the lectures from tape. This work could not even have been attempted if it were not for the loyal work and devotion of my secretary, Roslyn Pullen, and her husband, Neil. She lifted from my shoulders the most burdensome chores so that my mind and time could be freed for the job of producing this book. I should also like to thank Mr. Cesare Sacerdoti of Karnac Books for his enthusiasm for the project and for encouraging me in it. Last, but not least, I should like to thank Joan, my wife, who responded with enthusiasm when I first suggested turning my inchoate thoughts on narcissism into a lecture series. She has always been my best critic, and she did not fail me on this occasion. If the book is a success, it is largely due to her. I should never have formulated the ideas in the first place had it not been for my relationship with her, so I offer to her my heartfelt thanks.

NARCISSISM

A New Theory

INTRODUCTION

The word "narcissism" had not been invented when Tolstoy was writing *Anna Karenina*, but the phenomenon was well known, and I believe that Tolstoy had a unique understanding of it. As I quote from the book in several of the chapters, I will give a brief resumé of the plot. It must be understood that this summary is selective and not one of which a literary critic would approve. I have selected in this précis those elements of the story that best illustrate my theme and will, I hope, make sense of the quotations I have given.

The novel centres on three couples: Anna and her husband, Karenin; Oblonsky (sometimes called Stiva) and his wife, Dolly; and Kitty and Levin. To these three couples must be added Vronsky, who elopes with Anna, having initially paid court to Kitty. Anna and Oblonsky are brother and sister, and Kitty and Dolly are sisters, and in this way the three couples are intertwined. As the novel opens, Dolly is emotionally shattered because she has just found evidence that her husband, Oblonsky, has had a sexual affair with the French governess. In order to effect a reconciliation between himself and Dolly, Oblonsky asks his sister, Anna, to come from St. Petersburg

and stay with them in Moscow. Anna effects the desired reconciliation, but during her stay there is to be a grand ball. Kitty is infatuated with Vronsky, an army officer, who has been paying court to her. She has just turned down an offer of marriage from Levin. Tolstoy lets the reader understand that Levin is the worthwhile man, whereas Vronsky is a bounder. At the ball, all is set for the final *dénouement* of Vronsky's courtship of Kitty. Kitty's parents and all her family expect Vronsky to make a proposal of marriage to Kitty. Instead, Vronsky ignores Kitty, humiliates her, and makes an all-out bid for Anna, who participates whole-heartedly in this *grande passion*.

Back in St. Petersburg, Anna starts an affair with Vronsky. Karenin, her stiff-upper-lipped husband, reproves Anna for her public conduct while blinding himself to the evidence of her sexual affair. Finally, Anna explodes the news that she is Vronsky's lover. Karenin instructs her to behave outwardly with all decorum so as not to let the servants suspect anything. [This is *the proof* of Karenin's resistant blindness; servants always know long before their masters and do not need to be told such matters.] Then Anna becomes gravely ill and nearly dies. She calls for Karenin; *in periculo mortis*, she is almost reconciled to him and declares that there is another woman in her of whom she is afraid and that it was she, this inner woman, who had fallen in love with Vronsky. In the midst of this, Vronsky shoots himself but, though badly wounded, does not die. Anna recovers, and, as she does, her former hatred of Karenin returns; as if on impulse, she elopes with Vronsky and goes with him on the Grand Tour—to Italy and other places—finally returning to his country estate in Russia, where she lives with him.

Levin still pines for Kitty, and eventually, through the good offices of Oblonsky, there is a rapprochement and the two become engaged. The hesitant coming together of this timid but courageous pair is, of all the descriptions in the book, the most touching. Shortly after the marriage, Levin receives news that his brother Nikolai is dying and announces that he must go to him immediately. Kitty says she will go with him. At first Levin refuses, but Kitty insists, and together they go to a sleazy inn in a remote provincial town, where Kitty ministers to Nikolai with all the robust nursing ability of which her womanhood is capable. She gains Levin's respect, and the reader understands

the emotionally beneficial result of Kitty's determination. The reader is party to the drama of human life as it is unrolled in this marriage: the disappointment at the beginning of being repudiated, the timid courtship, the anxiety at the time of the engagement, the death of Levin's brother, the birth of their baby. Levin struggles to grasp the meaning of life, is plagued with thoughts of suicide, but "went on living", Tolstoy tells us. At the end of the book, Levin has found meaning; he has made that transition from meaninglessness to meaning.

Anna, on the other hand, becomes obsessed with whether or not Vronsky loves her. The slightest sign that he is distracted from her is given the grimmest interpretation. She becomes more and more tortured and ends by killing herself, by throwing herself under a train—and "the light flickered, grew dim and went out forever". [I contrast the mental attitudes of Kitty and Levin with those of Anna and Karenin to elucidate the narcissistic currents that exist in both couples but are so much more severe and entrenched in Anna and Karenin. I see Vronsky as the internal rapist who attacks the mental processes in both couples; he succeeds in the latter but fails in the former. I take Dolly and Oblonsky to be in a position about mid-way between the other two couples.]

This resumé of the plot is a poor substitute for reading or re-reading *Anna Karenina*, which I would encourage readers to do if they have the time, but it should be sufficient to give a context to the references and quotations that derive from the book.

One of the key concepts that I make use of in order to explicate narcissism is what I have termed the *lifegiver*—a mental object that the mind can opt for or refuse at a very deep level. I am aware that this implies a teleological cause, which is anathema to many scholars of psychoanalysis. In particular, psychologists and philosophers who have an interest in Freud and psychoanalysis may be offended by this "unscientific intrusion", as they may see it. I propose that it should not be too summarily dismissed. I would ask such scholars who are committed to explaining psychological phenomena by efficient causality alone to consider that such a framework may not be adequate to explain the clinical phenomena psychoanalysts are trying to understand in their daily work. It has become clearer

to me in recent times that there is a wide gulf between the actual theories that clinicians apply in their work and the psychoanalysis that is learned in universities.

I see this study of narcissism as a practical project, the purpose of which is to understand the pain of patients who suffer from this condition. For many years I believed that narcissistic patients were people who had been traumatized at an early stage in their development, and that this alone was sufficient to explain their narcissistic condition. I am convinced today that the traumas of childhood are insufficient to explain the origin of narcissism; I think that its cause is not the trauma itself, but the individual's response to it. The individual, as the clinician meets him or her, has an emotional relation to the trauma. The person is responding to life events, and it is this crucial element that I had ignored for many years, to the detriment of patients. I have been more effective in tackling narcissism since I have begun thinking along the lines suggested in this book. There is a theory of emotional action that underlies the propositions put forward. I realize that some of the formulations are crudely expressed, and, as I said earlier, my whole understanding of psychoanalysis has radically changed, but I have not yet been able to formulate a theoretical language in which to express some of these notions. I believe that the basic structure of our minds lies in emotional action tending towards an object that is mental, and that the source of this action is in the ego. This activity cannot be felt, but it can be known. Such a theory supersedes Freud's instinct or drive theory, and I am certain that cleaving to it as it is conceptualized obscures our understanding of the mind's emotional activity. A great deal of hard thinking needs to be done in order to put these concepts into a meaningful psychological framework.

CHAPTER ONE

Setting the stage

Our task is to try to understand what narcissism is; I am still thinking about the subject and feel dissatisfied with certain things I have to say. Part of the reason for this is, I think, the model of the mind with which we are working. Certainly for most of us who are psychoanalysts, or who have been influenced by psychoanalytic theory, the model we have of the mind is inadequate to explain the phenomenon of narcissism, so much groundwork is needed to establish a model of the mind that makes the phenomenon comprehensible.

According to James Strachey, the word "narcissism" was introduced by the sexologists Havelock Ellis and Paul Näcke. The term "narcissus-like" was used by Havelock Ellis in 1898, and in the following year the term "*narcissmus*" was introduced by Paul Näcke. In the intervening 90 years narcissism has become a household word; in analytic literature, given the great preoccupation with the subject, the term is used more than almost any other.

The myth of Narcissus

The story of the myth of Narcissus is told by Robert Graves (1960) in his book, *The Greek Myths*:

Narcissus was a Thespian, the son of the blue Nymph Leiriope, whom the River-god Cephisus had once encircled with the windings of his streams, and ravished. The seer Teiresias told Leiriope, the first person ever to consult him: "Narcissus will live to a ripe old age, provided that he never knows himself".

(You may remember that the old blind seer Teiresias came into the story of Oedipus.) That prophecy, "live to a ripe old age, provided that he never knows himself", is crucial in the understanding of narcissism.

Anyone might excusably have fallen in love with Narcissus, even as a child, and when he reached the age of sixteen, his path was strewn with heartlessly rejected lovers of both sexes; for he had a stubborn pride in his own beauty.

Among these lovers was the nymph Echo, who could no longer use her voice, except in foolish repetition of another's shout. One day when Narcissus went out to net stags, Echo stealthily followed him through the pathless forest, longing to address him, but unable to speak first. At last Narcissus, finding that he had strayed from his companions, shouted: "Is anyone here?"

"Here!" Echo answered.

"Come!"

"Come!"

"Why do you avoid me?"

"Why do you avoid me?"

"Let us come together here!"

"Let us come together here!" repeated Echo. [pp. 286-287]

It is significant in the myth that Narcissus is with Echo. A feature of the person dominated by narcissistic currents is to be just an echo of the other, and that echo can be quite sophisticated. One has a fair task, as a psychoanalyst or psychotherapist, recognizing when the patient is just carrying on a dialogue within a narcissistic structure.

"Let us come together here!" repeated Echo and joyfully rushed from her hiding place to embrace Narcissus. Yet he shook her off roughly and ran away. "I will die before you ever lie with me!" he cried.

"Lie with me!" Echo pleaded.

But Narcissus had gone, and she spent the rest of her life in lonely glens, pining away for love and mortification, until only her voice remained.

One day, Narcissus sent a sword to Ameinius, his most insistent suitor, after whom the river Ameinius is named; it is a tributary of the river Helisson, which flows into the Alpheius. Ameinius killed himself on Narcissus's threshold, calling on the gods to avenge his death.

Artemis heard the plea and made Narcissus fall in love, though denying him love's consummation. At Donacon in Thespia, he came upon a spring, clear as silver, and never yet disturbed by cattle, birds, wild beasts, or even by branches dropping off the trees that shaded it; and as he cast himself down, exhausted, on the grassy verges to slake his thirst, he fell in love with his own reflection. At first he tried to embrace and kiss the beautiful boy who confronted him, but he presently recognized himself, and lay gazing enraptured into the pool, hour after hour. How could he endure both to possess and yet not to possess? Grief was destroying him, yet he rejoiced in his torments; knowing at least that his other self would remain true to him, whatever happened.

Echo, although she had not forgiven Narcissus, grieved with him; she sympathetically echoed "Alas! Alas!" as he plunged a dagger into his breast, and also the final "Ah, youth, beloved in vain, farewell!" as he expired. His blood soaked the earth, and there sprang up the white narcissus flower with its red corolla. [pp. 287-288]

Positive and negative narcissism

I now want to say a few words about positive and negative narcissism. A habit has grown up of talking about narcissism in this way, and of describing these two aspects as different entities. I believe this to be a mistake, in that the positive and the negative always go together—one does not exist without the other. It may be just a semantic issue, in that someone talking of positive narcissism, for instance, may be talking about self-esteem or self-confidence. I prefer not to call that positive narcissism, however, because I think it leads to confusion. C. S. Lewis (1988), in his book, *Surprised by Joy*, makes a distinction between what he calls self-centredness and selfishness, which is relevant here:

Such is my ideal, and such then (almost) was the reality, of "settled, calm, Epicurean life". It is no doubt for my own good that I have been so generally prevented from leading it, for it is a life almost entirely selfish. Selfish, not self-centred; for in such a life my mind would be directed towards a thousand things, not one of which is myself. The distinction is not unimportant. One of the happiest men and most pleasing companions I have ever known was intensely selfish. On the other hand I have known people capable of real sacrifice whose lives were nevertheless a misery to themselves and to others, because self-concern and self-pity filled all their thoughts. Either condition will destroy the soul in the end. But till the end, give me the man who takes the best of everything (even at my expense) and then talks of other things, rather than the man who serves me and talks of himself, and whose very kindnesses are a continual reproach, a continual demand for pity, gratitude and admiration. [pp. 116–117]

While self-centredness does not express fully what narcissism is, if it is taken as a provisional definition, it makes some sort of sense to talk about "healthy selfishness". On the other hand, it is meaningless to talk about healthy self-centredness. If, by positive narcissism, confidence in oneself is meant, then fair enough—but that is not narcissism. In the analytic world

there is a tremendous confusion of tongues, and the result is that people are often talking at cross-purposes.

*The failure of psychotherapists
to treat narcissism*

I believe that we psychotherapists have largely failed when it comes to narcissism. There are various criteria that signal the presence of narcissism, one of which is the capacity to receive criticism. One might think that someone who has been through a course of intensive psychotherapy would be able to receive criticism, but this is frequently not the case. Many of us come out of psychotherapy—even extended psychotherapy or psychoanalysis—still suffering from severe narcissistic disorders. Sometimes such disorders are crippling. This is a serious situation; further on, I argue that most mental disorders flow from narcissism.

A number of times I have treated patients who had had previous analyses or therapies, and in several cases I have been struck by the fact that narcissism had not even been addressed, as far as I could see. A couple of years ago an analyst from London, Sydney Klein, gave a private talk to analysts on autism. In that talk he said that over the years he had conducted about 16 analyses that had been either second or third analyses, and he had discovered in all of them what he referred to as an autistic area that had been left untouched, or certainly unresolved. I think that narcissism and autism are a unitary clinical entity, and I will explore this later.

Karl Abraham said that the aim of psychoanalysis was to put things right at the foundation of the personality, to insure the individual against future mental illness. Obviously this is an ideal and we are bound to fall short of it in our work, but my observation is that we are falling very far short of it. I think that we might even have lost sight of the ideal and have become satisfied with symptomatic relief. It is quite possible for someone to feel a great deal better after therapy, even without narcissistic issues having been addressed, but in the event of a crisis the individual will experience the need for therapy once more.

*The importance of recognizing
narcissistic currents*

It is extremely important to be able to recognize people dominated by a narcissistic character structure. For one thing, such people, however gifted, cause considerable damage to the social structures to which they belong—to their families, their work organizations, clubs, societies.

Narcissism is not only present in individuals but it also contaminates organizations. One of the ways of differentiating a good-enough organization from one that is pathological is through its ability to exclude narcissistic characters from key posts. I have worked in organizations so riven with narcissistic currents that they seemed to have been present since the organization's foundation, and under such circumstances little creative work was done. I have also worked in organizations where, despite there being much narcissism and envy, creative development was fostered. In these places highly narcissistic people were usually prevented from obtaining senior positions. It is important to be able to make some sort of diagnosis of organizations with regard to narcissistic currents.

Of greatest importance, however, is the ability to recognize narcissistic currents in our own characters. None of us is free from narcissism, and one of the fundamental aspects of the condition is that it blinds us to self-knowledge. You will often hear people say, "Oh, I'm very narcissistic", or "It was a wound to my narcissism". Such comments are not a true recognition of the condition; they are throw-away lines. Really to recognize narcissism in oneself is profoundly distressing.

Bettelheim, in his book, *Freud and Man's Soul* (1983), writes lucidly about the degree to which many people in the psychoanalytic and therapeutic professions are blinded from knowledge of themselves:

For nearly forty years, I have taught courses in psychoanalysis to American graduate students and residents in psychiatry. Again and again, I have been made to see how seriously [he is talking about the English translations here] the English translations impede students' efforts to gain a true understanding of Freud and of psycho-analysis. Although most of the bright and dedicated students whom

It has been my pleasure to teach were eager to learn what psycho-analysis is all about, they were largely unable to do so. Almost invariably, I have found the psycho-analytic concepts had become for these students a way of looking only at others from a safe distance—nothing that had any bearing on them. They observed other people through the spectacles of abstraction, tried to comprehend them by means of intellectual concepts, never turning their gaze inward to the soul or their own unconscious. This was true even of the students who were in analysis themselves—it made no appreciable difference. Psycho-analysis had helped some of them to be more at peace with themselves and to cope with life, had helped others to free themselves of troublesome neurotic symptoms, but their misconceptions about psycho-analysis remained. Psycho-analysis as these students perceived it was a purely intellectual system—a clever, exciting game—rather than the acquisition of insights into oneself and one's own behaviour which were potentially deeply upsetting. It was always *someone else's* unconscious they analysed, hardly ever their own. They did not give enough thought to the fact that Freud, in order to create psycho-analysis and understand the workings of the unconscious, had had to analyse his *own* dreams, to understand his *own* slips of the tongue and the reasons *he* forgot things or made various other mistakes. [pp. 6–7]

What Bettelheim is referring to here is narcissism, which is deeply antagonistic to self-knowledge.

One of the ways a person powerfully dominated by narcissistic currents destroys self-knowledge, as I think most of us know, is by projecting the unwanted aspects of their character—jealousy, envy, sadism, or whatever—and the perfect person into whom the psychotherapist can make that sort of projection is, of course, the patient. For analysts and therapists there is an enormous difference between making an interpretation based on a denial of self-knowledge and making one that arises from a recognition of what is in oneself. It is of no therapeutic value if, when pointing out to patients that they are being cruel, or seem to be behaving in a possessive or jealous way, analysts disown those aspects of themselves. When this is happening either an accusing tone develops between the

therapist and the patient or the therapist attempts to reassure the patient, and neither approach is of value.

Someone once told me that Erich Fromm was able to say to a patient, "You are living this self-centred life, you are just feathering your own nest, and most of your problems result from this", without sounding accusatory. He said these things in such a way that they seemed to be statements of fact, not unbearable traits of which he was ridding himself. It is enormously important, for those of us who see patients, to try to grasp the narcissistic currents in ourselves.

Conceptual tools

Now I want to go through some of the conceptual tools that we need in order to try to grasp narcissism.

First, we need a concept of knowledge. When we talk about knowing something, we generally mean that we have knowledge of something that is real, although, as you probably know, there have been philosophers like Berkeley who believed that reality is an illusion and we cannot know that anything exists outside ourselves. There is a huge difference between something that is known and something that is surmised or felt.

We also need to be able to conceive of psychic realities—realities that cannot be smelled, touched, seen, or heard. Examples of such realities are friendship, an hallucination, a dream, a thought, a feeling, an intuition, an intention, a judgement, truth, goodness, courage, confidence, inhibition, omnipotence, humbleness, cruelty, revenge, self-loathing, hatred, love, guilt, shame, deception. These are realities, in that we are capable of knowing them. They are psychic objects of knowledge. In trying to conceptualize narcissism, I make use of a particular psychic object, which I refer to as the "*lifegiver*". I expand on this later.

We attribute qualities, such as goodness and badness, to psychic objects. We judge cruelty to be bad, love to be good, truthfulness to be good, deceit bad, confidence good, inhibition bad, and so on. The notion of there being analytic or therapeutic neutrality regarding qualities of psychic objects is a complete illusion. Every psychotherapist makes judgements,

and every patient makes judgements. The patient comes complaining of depression and judges it to be bad, for instance. The therapist may judge the patient's depression differently, but a judgement is made nevertheless.

We also need some concept of the self and a concept of projection and introjection, the mechanisms through which we have mutual contact with other human beings. Two inanimate objects, two stones on a beach, do not interpenetrate each other, but once we cross that great boundary between the inanimate and the animate world, the capacity for interpenetration of one living thing by another arises.

The French philosopher Henri Bergson, in his book *Creative Evolution* (1919), describes the Mason wasp, which stings a caterpillar at a precise point on its body, paralysing it. The wasp then lays its eggs in the paralysed body; the eggs hatch in three days' time in the living though paralysed flesh, providing food for the little grubs. If the Mason wasp stings one millimetre away from the right point, it kills the caterpillar, and the exercise does not work. Bergson asks, in an anthropomorphic way, "How does the wasp know how to sting in the right place?" He is not satisfied with the answer, "by instinct"; he thinks that there is a type of sympathetic communication between the two insects, enabling the wasp to "feel" where to sting.

We make contact with other human beings either by projecting ourselves into their world or by introjecting them into our world. We either put ourselves into the shoes of another, or we take them into our inner sense of things. A variety of psychic actions are continually taking place at a deep level, beneath the threshold of awareness, and either they can be of a sort that messes things up for us or they can be creative both for ourselves and for the people with whom we are in close contact. The ego, if you like to call it that, is active, and it does things like identifying with, projecting, introjecting, splitting, or coalescing. Instead, you could say that choices take place at a deep level. I have found that as soon as I say this, people think of the types of choices that are made at a conscious level, so I want to illustrate the level that I am talking about.

When I was in London, a colleague of mine was taking a year off, and he asked me if I would be prepared to see any of his patients if they were in difficulty. I said that I would. He duly

went off for a year, and after about six months a woman patient of his rang me up and asked if she could come and see me. Her reason for coming to see me was that she had had two previous boyfriends, both of whom were impotent or had become impotent in relation to her, and to her horror her new boyfriend—call him Michael—had also become impotent. I was in a bit of a dilemma, because I realized this was rather a deep matter and my colleague was going to be away for a further six months. It also seemed clear that supportive therapy alone was not going to help her. Anyway, I offered her a contract of 20 sessions, once a week, which would take her nearly to the time when my colleague returned.

She came and talked about her background, her parents, her siblings, and I just listened and made a few innocuous comments. In about the fourth session something crystallized, and I was about to give expression to it when it went out of my mind—I lost it. During the next session the same thing happened: something became clear, and I was just about to make an interpretation when it evaporated. I then made the connection between her boyfriend's impotence and what was happening in my mind, and I felt fairly certain that there was a connection between the two. I saw it then as my task, the next time something began to crystallize, to be able to maintain it mentally and give expression to it to her. Later on in that session something did become clear, and I concentrated all my psychic attention on it and made an interpretation. I put it into words, and there was silence. I sensed that what I had said had been received by her.

She came back the following week with a smile on her face and said to me, "A funny thing happened when I got home. Michael came round, and we made love, and he was able to penetrate me. There was no problem. I have a feeling that it had something to do with the session you and I had." I have no doubt that through my own psychic attention to what was happening, the interpretation I made, and the interaction between the two of us, a change occurred in her, which affected her boyfriend's capacity to make love to her.

She did not know what the change was, but her psychic activity altered, and that changed her circumstances. Psychic

choices and actions affect people in the environment, especially those in the intimate environment. One will never understand narcissism without grasping that conceptual notion.

The philosopher Edmund Husserl (1973) says that the ego is always active. Even in receiving, it is active.

This phenomenologically necessary concept of receptivity is in no way exclusively opposed to that of the *activity of the ego*, under which all acts proceeding in a specific way from the ego-pole are to be included. On the contrary, receptivity must be regarded as the lowest level of activity. The ego consents to what is coming and takes it in. [p. 79]

As we all know, in a negative hallucination it is possible to reject an incoming stimulus completely. In London I used to have a huge painting on one wall of my consulting room. I had a patient who had come for two years, and one day he came in, looked up at it and said, "You've put a painting up". It had been there all along. What had he been seeing before? He had blanked the painting out. It would have been necessary for his ego to have been active in order for him to receive that impression. Something psychic is always taking place when we receive. So with that woman to whom I was referring; when I made that interpretation, she received something, and that psychic action changed her boyfriend's capacity to make love to her. I have used this example in order to show the *level* at which ego activity takes place.

Next, it is important to have a concept of analogy, so that when talking about actions that take place below the threshold of awareness, when talking about the self in its activity, or when talking about parts of the self, one can use analogical terms. In this way one can approach things that cannot be experienced directly. Language and concepts that are derived from conscious perception of the world always have to be used analogically when referring to things that can only be inferred.

Finally, another concept that I use frequently is the principle of omission—the principle that when something is done, there is also something that is not done. This may seem obvious, but usually what is not done is the crucial factor in understanding. For instance, in narcissism, which is traditionally

defined as the ego taking its own self as love object, the crucial question is what is not done.

The tools, then, that we need in order to attempt to grasp narcissism are the concepts of knowledge, psychic reality, the composite self, projection and introjection, analogy, and the principle of omission.

CHAPTER TWO

The composite self

Every piece of reality stands in relation to some other piece of reality: whenever we define something, we define it in its relation to something else. The only way to think of reality as relationless is to think of the whole of reality—the universe in its entirety, with nothing outside it. Every theory that we devise describes some aspect of reality relating to some other aspect. For instance, if I am standing on a beach looking at some seagulls at the edge of the surf and notice over time that they are slowly moving higher up the beach, in order to explain the scene satisfactorily to myself I have to invoke several scientific concepts. I need to understand that the seagulls are moving up the beach because the tide is coming in, and in order to understand the tide coming in, I have to have recourse to the law of gravity and the moon's gravitational pull upon the earth, which creates the tides. I also have to understand the earth's gravitational pull on the moon, which keeps the moon in orbit around the earth. And in order to explain that, I have to have an understanding of the earth's mass and the moon's mass and the relationship between the two. All this partly explains why the seagulls are moving up the beach, but

it does not explain the why of seagulls. To grasp that, I have to know that seagulls are organisms that have evolved to fit a particular ecological niche—that of scavengers that feed on decaying living matter. To understand that, I need to have some knowledge of evolutionary theory. So just to explain that fairly simple scene in front of me, I need to have a grasp of several scientific concepts. In order to explain anything that is in front of us, we need some appreciation of the complex interplay of relationships between one thing and another.

The self is relational

When it comes to a concept of the self, we have to look into how the self is structured. As with all realities, the self is inherently relational. It is always in relation to other selves in the human community. From birth, even from conception, this is so. If when the baby was born there was no tendency in it to find its way to the mother, to the breast, it would die. This relational nature permeates all the parts of the self in the way that gravity permeates all matter. We shall come to see, as we go on, that the core of narcissism is a hatred of the relational—a hatred of something that is inherent in our being.

A "relationship" implies two or more parties. If two things are the same, there can no longer be a relationship between them. If I have two glasses of milk on a table, they can be in relation to one another, but if I pour them both into a single jug, then there is no relation, there is just milk. In its hatred of the relational, one of the ways that narcissism operates is to destroy separateness. In people dominated by narcissistic currents there is a failure of separateness between themselves and others, and they will assume that you think in the same way that they think.

So, the being of the self is structured in relation to another. We call the part of the self that is in relation to the other the object (object relations theory refers to this object), and the other part of the self the subject. This subject-object character permeates the self in the same way that H_2O molecules are found throughout water. If any part of the self is dissociated

from the rest, that part bears the same subject-object structure. I make this point because existentialist analysts such as Rollo May and his school make the being of the individual the centre of their endeavours and deny the subject-object character of the self. I am sympathetic to their desire to reach what they call the person's inherent being, but I think it is a mistake to believe that this being is not structured in a subject-object way. It seems to me that those who have based themselves on object relations theory also have a notion of the object dissociated from the subject. This is never the case. The being of the whole permeates all the parts.

The person who conceptualized the subject-object character of the self most clearly was Jung. In 1935 he gave a series of five lectures at the Tavistock Clinic in London, and for a brief, explicit summary of his views these lectures are excellent. In the third of these lectures he says (Jung, 1977):

Ladies and gentlemen, this leads me to something very important—the fact that a complex with its given tension or energy has the tendency to form a little personality of itself. It has a sort of body, a certain amount of its own physiology. It can upset the stomach. It upsets the breathing, it disturbs the heart—in short, it behaves like a partial personality. For instance, when you want to say or do something and unfortunately a complex interferes with this intention, then you say or do something different from what you intended. You are simply interrupted, and your best intention gets upset by the complex, exactly as if you had been interfered with by a human being or by circumstances from outside. Under these conditions we really are forced to speak of the tendencies of complexes to act as if they were characterized by a certain amount of will-power. When you speak of will-power you naturally ask about the ego. Where then is the ego that belongs to the will-power of the complexes? We know our own ego-complex, which is supposed to be in full possession of the body. It is not, but let us assume that it is a centre in full possession of the body, that there is a focus which we call the ego, and that the ego has a will and can do something with its components. The ego also is an agglomeration of highly toned contents, so that in principle there is no difference between the ego-complex and any other complex. . . .

The so-called unity of consciousness is an illusion. It is really a wish-dream. We like to think that we are one; but we are not, most decidedly not. We are not really masters in our house. We like to believe in our will-power and in our energy and in what we can do; but when it comes to a real show-down we find that we can do it only to a certain extent, because we are hampered by those little devils the complexes. Complexes are autonomous groups of associations that have a tendency to move by themselves, to live their own life apart from our intentions. I hold that our personal unconscious, as well as the collective unconscious, consists of an indefinite, because unknown, number of complexes or fragmentary personalities. [pp. 72-73]

So, you see, he speaks of there being a subject-object in each part. What I would like to stress, which I think he slightly muddles towards the end, is that each of these parts is a source of action in itself. I have no objection to the word "object" being used in object relations theory, as long as it is understood that the object is also a subject of action. If one is unaware of that, then confusion is inevitable.

When we talk about an internalized mother, father, brother, sister, or whatever, these are internalized objects, and these objects act. They act within the personality. At certain points they may even take over the personality.

The self is made up of parts

I want to stress this point about the self being made up of parts. For instance, if I am feeling paranoid towards someone, I might say that he is just feathering his own nest or that she is just a jealous bitch. Alternatively, I might say that someone is totally dedicated and caring. It seems difficult, however, for human beings to hold emotionally to the idea that someone can be a mixture of bad and good qualities, that someone can be corrupt but wise, envious but caring. Notice that I have had to use the word "but". We do not say of someone that they

are envious *and* caring. I will quote a passage from Somerset Maugham, in his book *The Summing Up* (1976):

What has chiefly struck me in human beings is their lack of consistency. I have never seen people all of a piece. It has amazed me that the most incongruous traits should exist in the same person and for all that yield a plausible harmony. I have often asked myself how characteristics, seemingly irreconcilable, can exist in the same person. I have known crooks who were capable of self-sacrifice, sneak-thieves who were sweet-natured, and harlots for whom it was a point of honour to give good value for money. [p. 40]

And later in the book, Maugham says of writers:

But the point of the writer is that he is not one man but many. It is because he is many that he can create many, and the measure of his greatness is the number of selves that he comprises. When he fashions a character that does not carry conviction it is because there is in himself nothing of that person; he has had to fall back on observation, and so has only described, not begotten. [p. 152]

The writer does not feel "for", he feels "in". It is not sympathy that he feels, which often results in sentimentality, but empathy. In psychotherapeutic work the therapist needs to feel "in", but often what happens instead is feeling "for". I think that probably quite a number of narcissistic disorders remain unresolved because in the therapeutic endeavour there has been feeling "for" and not feeling "in"—sympathy, not empathy.

A good literary example of a combination of disparate elements in the one person is given in the character of Oskar Schindler in Thomas Keneally's book *Schindler's Ark* (1983). As you may know, Schindler was an actual person. In the prologue Keneally says this of him:

Herr Oskar Schindler, chancing his glimmering shoes on the icy pavement in this old and elegant quarter of Cracow, was not a virtuous man in the customary sense. In this city he kept house with his German mistress and maintained a long affair with his Polish secretary. His wife Emilie chose to live most of the time at home in Moravia, though she sometimes came to Poland to visit him. There's this to be

said for him, that to all his women he was a well-mannered and generous lover. But under the normal interpretation of virtue that's no excuse.

Likewise he was a drinker. Some of the time he drank for the pure glow of it, at other times with associates, bureaucrats, SS men, for more palpable results. Like few others, he was capable of staying canny while drinking, and of keeping his head. That again, though, under the narrow interpretation of morality, has never been an excuse for carousing. And although Herr Schindler's merit is well documented, it is a feature of his ambiguity that he worked within or, at least, on the strength of, a corrupt and savage scheme. [p. 2]

Keneally goes on to stress the disparate elements in the one person, parts that seem to act independently of one another. I had thought that to be wise and to be corrupt were mutually exclusive, until I came across a man who seemed both wise and corrupt. Perhaps if he had not been corrupt he would have been wiser, but the two qualities did seem to co-exist in the same person. Further on I discuss our desire for integration and how the personality integrates itself. The parts can be in a state of openness to one another, or they can be antagonistic to each other.

In *Anna Karenina* (a synopsis of which is given in the Introduction), Tolstoy describes how different parts of Anna operate. At the point where she appears to be dying, she regrets the way she has behaved towards Karenin, and a quite different personality emerges. As she recovers, and with Vronsky's return, something closes over in her, and she begins to repudiate Karenin again.

There are many points in the novel where you see different parts of particular characters operating. For instance, there is the episode where Dolly, who is staying with Levin and Kitty, decides to visit Anna and Vronsky when they are on Vronsky's estate, and she goes there looking forward to seeing Anna. The elegant dinner that evening Dolly finds awkward and disagreeable, and by the end of the evening she feels that everyone has been play-acting. She goes to her bedroom, and Anna comes and pours her heart out to her, but by then Dolly is determined to return to Levin's the next morning, rather than staying for

two days, as she had originally intended. On leaving Levin's, she had felt weighed down by the cares of motherhood, but within a day she sees these cares in quite a new light and is keen to get back to the children. On the return journey the coachman remarks that the horses had not been fed properly, that back at home they would have fed them better. The interesting thing is that Dolly definitely feels uneasy. When she gets back, Levin and the others ask how Anna and Vronsky were, and Dolly says how well she has been received, and how wonderful it all was. She was not lying—she had just returned to her social personality, and her insights and feelings were in some other part of her.

Another instance of different parts of a person is shown in Anna shortly before she commits suicide. She thinks to herself, "Perhaps I'll go and pour out the whole truth to Dolly", and she gets a carriage and goes to see her. When she arrives she finds Kitty is there and loses her nerve. There was one sort of desire, and then something else took over and she gave up.

Great literature aims to describe the different parts of ourselves, the inner conflicts of the soul. Anna could not bring the different parts of herself into harmony: her desire to have Seriozsha with her, her desire to be accepted by society, her desire to be loved by Vronsky, her desire that Karenin treat her favourably. Her agony of disunity grows in its unbearability.

The personality is not a unitary phenomenon. We are all made up of parts, each part capable of functioning as a separate little person. The basic psychological problem for human beings is to get all these parts to act together harmoniously. When we talk of someone having emotional problems, as opposed to practical problems, we mean that they are having trouble "getting it together"—becoming one. We aspire to be whole, but it is always a struggle because we are battling against something. This struggle for coherence is at the heart of psychodynamic psychotherapy. When someone comes for a consultation, it is not put like that, but the patient is aware of things going wrong because there is something operating that is against their conscious interests.

The concept of conscious and unconscious is a division that is based on what the individual is aware of in himself, and capable of being aware of, as opposed to those parts of himself

of which he is not aware and those parts of which he does not want to be aware. Saying that some parts of a person are conscious and others are unconscious only gives us their characteristics. The reason why we are not aware of some parts of ourselves or some of the personalities in ourselves relates closely to narcissism. If I am antagonistic to some part of myself—not in relation to some part of myself—I cannot know it. This determination on my part not to know about it is what is referred to as the unconscious. It is unfortunate phraseology, because it suggests that it comes about through no consent of the self. Later I show that this is not so.

In his theory of types Jung gave a useful distinction between four different parts of the personality: thinking, feeling, intuition, and sensation. He said that the feeling part of the personality is at the opposite pole to the thinking part, and he suggested that when one part is operative, it nearly always suppresses another. We know something of this when we talk of the defence of "intellectualization"—when feelings are dissociated from an intellectual idea. The reverse happens when feelings are dissociated from thinking. I have not come across a word for this defence in the literature, but it is just as common. In my clinical experience, the defence of intellectualization is nearly always accompanied by its opposite. I call feelings dissociated from thinking "sentimentalization". In the passage quoted Maugham gives the clue to it. If you feel "for" someone, then the result is sentimental, whereas if you feel "in" someone, you have feeling that is genuine. Genuine feeling is backed by knowledge. The difference between these two is enormous and of crucial importance to psychotherapists.

Jung also pairs sensation and intuition. Intuition is closely linked to imaginative insight and sensation to sensual touch; the one can cancel the other out.

Melanie Klein and Fairbairn also spoke about each part of the self being a little personality in its own right, though their language differs from Jung's. Melanie Klein said that there are basic building blocks out of which the self is constructed—a penis and a vagina, a mouth and a nipple, a child and parents, a child and siblings. These parts are meant to come together.

Melanie Klein and Jung both hold that there are preconceptions built into the very being of the self, that the personality is

built up of these parts, and that the diverse people of our world symbolize these different parts. We can never say that we have no part whatever in the emotional character structure of any person with whom we come into contact. This is so whether we are talking of terrible people like Hitler, Idi Amin, or Myra Hindley, or of people of extreme courage and heroic virtue like Socrates and Kierkegaard.

What evidence is there for this theory of the self as the source of action, built up of many parts that are each a source of action? The evidence is not all that good, but some is provided by hypnotism. It is well known that the hypnotist cannot succeed in the face of total opposition from the patient, but the hypnotized individual acts under the instruction of the hypnotist in a way that may be contrary to what they want in the unhypnotized state. Therefore there is another personality—a complex, in Jung's terminology—acting under the suggestion of another. There is a personality under the direction of—in agreement with—the hypnotist. We can carry this further and look at the suggestibility of one person to another. It is difficult to see how this can be explained except by invoking the presence of a personality in agreement with the suggester.

Other evidence is provided by fiction writers who so often talk about the characters they have created as taking over, as having a life of their own. Of course, these characters come from the author; they are in the author, part of the author. This brings us back to the second Maugham quote: "the point of the writer is that he is not one man but many". Graham Greene says that he wrote in order to make meaning out of the chaos of human experience; I think he meant the inner chaos—trying to bring together the parts within himself.

The relation of the "I" to the inner personalities

I now want to talk a little about the relationship of the ego—I prefer just the "I"—to these inner personalities. At one time I had a patient in analysis who described how, as a child, he once gobbled up a whole tin of biscuits his mother had made.

He went on to say that on another occasion she had made some fudge, and he had gobbled all that up too. At this point I had a reasonable conversation with him, discussing this greedy gobbler. He said "Yes, I really was a gobbler. Gobbled up everything." I then commented that he frequently gobbled up my words in a similar way. He assented laughingly, saying, "Oh, yes, I probably do. But surely you don't mind that." There was only one thing wrong. I did mind.

The following day he told me that he had had the thought that it was necessary to trust before being able to love. I had said something like that to him earlier in the week, so I remarked to him that he was spilling out what I had said two days before. He was absolutely furious and said that it was something he had always known. After some further conversation aimed at clarification, I said that it seemed that the gobbler, when well and truly caught in the act, did everything he could to conceal his true nature. The patient became hot and sweaty and said he did not want to come and see me any more. He did continue to come, however. The point I wish to make is that one day he was talking about the gobbler but emotionally disowning it—he was in the personality of "the disclaimer"—and the following day he was in the personality of the gobbler.

In my experience in psychotherapy, when a patient talks about some aspect of himself, it is nearly always a warning that, the next time you see him, he is going to be presenting that aspect. It is like the producer of a play saying, "This is what is going to happen in the next act".

The gobbler story is an example of the "I" acting first in one personality then in another, and we never like to see that we have been acting in two quite different set-ups. Shame is the emotion we experience when we are aware of the parts of ourselves that are not integrated. This is because we are aware that we bear some responsibility for actions that have occurred within us that have resulted in such discord—actions that we keep in being. This is primary. The secondary thing is that if we want to get on well in society and be respected, we must show ourselves to be caring and not greedy, and as a result when we are operating in an uncaring way, we have to hide it. Shame is closely related to certain aspects of narcissism because one thing that we all do, to the extent that we are dominated by

narcissistic currents, is to hide particular sources of action. One of the tasks of psychotherapy is to find these.

In the last couple of years I have been aware of several organizations taking enormous trouble to find the right person for some important post, and within a year it has become clear that the person is totally unsuitable. Clearly important aspects of the personalities of these people remained hidden, despite elaborate interviews and so on.

I once came across someone who, when he was talking to me, was in agreement with what I had said; but when he was talking with someone else whose outlook was quite different from mine, he would agree with that person. He acted in this way with all the people with whom he conversed. Such behaviour results from a variety of different personalities operating—a state of total disunity—and often causes much confusion in the human community.

If you disown a part of yourself, you become victim to that aspect in other people. Let us say there is a part of myself that is exceedingly jealous and that I disown it. It nevertheless keeps operating and affecting the way I behave towards others. One of the classic stratagems is for me to link up with someone who is extremely jealous, and then that person can carry this part of me which I disown—but I then suffer the effects the whole time. The paradox is that as soon as I am able to own the jealous part and say, "Yes, I am in relation with this part of me; this belongs to me and not you", the jealousy diminishes. The destructive aspect lies not so much in the jealousy as in the fact that it is disowned. In fact, I need a certain amount of jealousy to manage my affairs.

In common parlance we describe persons who are governed by one then another of their inner personalities as "weak", whereas "strong" personalities are those in whom the "I" acts in and through all parts in unison.

CHAPTER THREE

The narcissistic option

In this chapter we will be trying to grasp a psychological reality. Just because such a reality is difficult to grasp, it is no less real than something which is easily defined, and if you are unaware of its reality the consequences can be disastrous. A professor who taught me philosophy many years ago used to give this analogy. He used to say that in a fog the outlines of an oncoming car are vague, but the car is just as real as if it were in bright sunlight. It is also more dangerous, because if you do not see the car, it may run you over. What follows in this exposition is a metaphor—it is pointing to the real but it is not the real itself. The reality can only be grasped by a personal psychic action.

In all theoretical models within the psychoanalytic literature, narcissism occurs when the ego takes itself as erotic object—or, to put it in classical Freudian terminology, when the libido takes its own self as love object. Returning to the principle of omission which I mentioned earlier, it is often what is *not* stated that gives a clue to the reality you are trying to get hold of, rather than what *is* stated. We have a statement here

that narcissism occurs when the libido or the ego takes its own self as erotic object. This suggests that there is an alternative; this may sound obvious, but this alternative is seldom focused on clearly. If there is some other object that the ego can take rather than itself, what is it? Logically, if Narcissus can fall in love with his own reflection, the alternative is that he can fall in love with another.

At birth, even before birth, the new organism has an objective: to survive. However, it has an additional objective, which is more than just survival, for when an organism dies, the matter from which it was formed—the flesh, bones, and so on—survives. It is a law of physics that matter cannot be annihilated; it simply decomposes into other agglomerations. The additional objective of the organism is, therefore, to survive as a living being. What do we mean when we talk about something being alive? What distinction do we make between inanimate matter and living matter? What is the difference between a bit of jelly from your Sunday trifle and an amoeba? Henri Bergson (1919) (who, incidentally, was born and died at almost the same time as Freud) defined life as a tendency to act on matter. A living thing both reacts to the environment—is conditioned by the environment—and acts upon the environment. Life has within it an initiatory source of action. This definition is in opposition to the position taken by what one might call stimulus-response psychology—the position that Skinner takes.

* * *

It is quite common, in ordinary parlance, to speak of someone being absolutely dead, and we also speak of social systems being moribund. We are obviously speaking metaphorically, so what do we mean? We mean that the person lacks personal goal-directed behaviour, lacks emotional initiative, does not have the capacity to act creatively on his social environment. Such a person will find his way to meals each day, to his bed at night, and so on, so we are talking of some sort of initiative that carries him beyond physical survival.

When we say that someone is alive, we mean that they have in them the initiatory capacity to create change in their social environment—change in the emotional responses and activities of those around them. We are not referring to the sort of person

who rushes about organizing things. We are talking about activity at a deeper level. As most of us know, if you are treating someone who is busy-busy and rushing around, you often find that inside the person is dead. I once treated a woman in analysis who led the most exotic, active life and travelled around the world, involved in all sorts of startling projects; however, as analysis proceeded, it became clear that inside she was dead, and she had to keep involving herself in exciting situations in order to keep going.

Initiating creative action

Now I want to give a couple of examples—first from a short passage from Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and then from the second volume of Graham Greene's autobiography, *Ways of Escape* (1980)—showing the initiation of creative action and thus producing a creative response in the social environment.

You may remember that about three months after Kitty and Levin eventually marry, Levin receives a letter from his brother Nikolai's former mistress to say that Nikolai is dying. Kitty hands the letter to him; he reads it and looks distressed.

"What is it? What is the matter?"

"She writes that my brother Nikolai is at death's door. I shall go to him."

Kitty's face changed at once. Thoughts . . . of Dolly all vanished.

"When will you go?" she said.

"Tomorrow."

"And I'll come with you, may I?"

"Kitty! Really! What an idea!" he said reproachfully.

"What do you mean?" she asked, hurt that he should seem to take her suggestion unwillingly and be vexed with it. "Why shouldn't I go? I shan't be in your way, I . . ."

"I have to go because my brother is dying," said Levin.

"But why should you . . ."

"Why? For the same reason as you."

"Even at a moment of such gravity for me she thinks only of how dull it will be for her alone here," reflected Levin. [p. 514]

This is absolutely typical of narcissistic thinking. While this novel examines a variety of things, it is basically examining the narcissistic state—and Kitty and Levin are the least narcissistic couple in it. Oblonsky and Dolly are more so, and Anna and Karenin are absolutely gripped by it. Yet the way Levin ruminates—"She thinks only of how dull it will be for her"—the contemptuous, deprecatory motive he attributes to her, is typically narcissistic.

"It's out of the question," he said sternly.

"And I tell you that if you go, I shall go with you. Most certainly!" she said with angry haste. "Why is it out of the question? What makes you say it's out of the question?"

"Because the Lord knows how I shall get there, and what sort of inns I shall have to put up at. You would be a hindrance to me," said Levin, endeavouring to be cool.

"Not at all. I don't want anything. Where you can go, I can . . ."

"Well, if only because that woman is there with whom you can't associate."

"I don't know and don't care to know who's there and what. I know that my husband's brother is dying, and that my husband is going to him, and that I am going with my husband to . . ."

"Kitty! Don't be angry! But just think a little—this is such a serious time that I can't bear to think that you should bring your weakness into it, your dislike of being left alone. If you are afraid of feeling lonely, well, go to Moscow for a while!" [pp. 514–515]

Levin comes out with the negative thought, and that is significant. Anna with Karenin and with Vronsky ruminates in the same way, but she does not say what she is thinking.

"There, you *always* ascribe mean, contemptible motives to me!" she burst out with tears of resentment and fury. "I didn't mean—it wasn't weakness, it wasn't . . . I feel it's my duty to be with my husband when he is in trouble, but you want to hurt me on purpose, you just don't want to understand. . . ."

"No, this is dreadful! To be such a slave!" cried Levin getting up, unable to restrain his annoyance any longer.

But in the same second he was conscious that he was beating himself.

"Then why did you marry? You could have been free. Why did you, if you regret it?" she said, jumping up and running away into the drawing-room.

When he went after her, he found her sobbing.

He began to speak, striving to find words not to dissuade her but simply to pacify her. But she would not listen and would not agree to any of his arguments. He bent over her and took her hand, which resisted him. He kissed her hand, kissed her hair, kissed her hand again—still she was silent. At last, when he took her face in both his hands and said, "Kitty!" she suddenly recovered herself, and, after she had shed a few more tears, they made it up.

It was settled that they should start together on the following day. [p. 515]

The narcissistic attitude is clear in the motives Levin ascribes to Kitty, but the important point is that Kitty will not accept what he says about her. She speaks up and will not have any of it. When you look at Karenin and Anna, they reinforce each other the whole time. Kitty could just have become resentful and gone off to Moscow to be with Dolly, but she did not. She had the capacity to have a creative effect on the social environment. As we know, Kitty goes with Levin, and it is quite clear that what she does is very much appreciated by him. They find Nikolai in the most dreadful circumstances. She cleans up the room and makes Nikolai comfortable, which he much appreciates, and then he finally dies. I think it is at this stage that Kitty and Levin get married in the real sense. People might be married at the altar rails, or at the registry office, or wherever, but they often are not; frequently a crisis is needed for the marriage to really take place, or to fail to do so.

The second example comes from the second volume of Graham Greene's (1980) autobiography where he is talking of the art critic Herbert Read (who played a considerable part in the editing of the complete works of Jung). Graham Greene writes:

Certainly my meeting with Herbert Read was an important event in my life. He was the most gentle man I have ever known, but it was a gentleness which had been tested in

the worst experiences of his generation. The young officer, who gained the Military Cross and a DSO in action on the Western Front, had carried with him to all that mud and death Robert Bridges's anthology *The Spirit of Man*, Plato's *Republic* and *Don Quixote*. Nothing had changed in him. It was the same man twenty years later who could come into a room full of people and you wouldn't notice his coming—you noticed only that the whole atmosphere of a discussion had quietly altered, that even the relations of one guest with another had changed. No one any longer would be talking for effect, and when you looked round for an explanation there he was—complete honesty born of complete experience had entered the room and unobtrusively taken a chair. [p. 39]

We are talking about a differentiation in human action, which we define by some value. We assign a value to Kitty's action. When we talk of a brain-damaged person as being just a vegetable, we judge him not to be living a human life. The capacity for creative fashioning of the social environment is crucial in a psychotherapist.

*The object that is spurned:
the lifegiver*

Margaret Mahler made the point that when an infant is born physically, it does not necessarily mean it has been born psychologically or emotionally. The emotional birth rests upon a choice. If the narcissistic situation is one where someone takes his own self as love object, the question then is, what is the alternative object? There is another object that can be chosen, and that alternative object, if chosen, then becomes the source of initiatory action and upon that lies the person's capacity to be a source of action.

We know from our own observation and from studies of children that the infant seeks out an object, the breast, from which to feed. The infant also seeks out the arms and physical holding of the mother. But what is the object? It is not just milk that the infant is seeking. You may say that the infant is seek-

ing the breast and the comforting aspect of the breast, combined with the mother's nurturing, kisses, holding, and so on. But then one needs to ask, what is the person seeking later in life, in post-adolescence? If the direction is not to the self, what is it to? It is a mistake to say the infant is seeking the breast or the mother. It is the breast, but it is also not the breast. It is the mother, but it is also not the mother. Instead, one has to posit the existence of an emotional object that is associated with the breast, associated with the mother, or in later life associated with the other person; it is *in* the other—an object that a person seeks as an alternative to seeking himself. If being emotionally alive means to be the source of creative emotional action, there has to be a turning to this object, and this object has to be taken in. I call this object the "*lifegiver*". It might be called something else, but some term is needed to designate the object that is different from and opposed to the self, an object that the ego is able to choose.

What is the nature of the *lifegiver*? It is a psychic object located in relation to a breast, a penis, a vagina, the self, the analyst, or the therapist. While it is not any one of these primary objects of fertilization or nurture in itself, it has no existence apart from them.

I would like to stress that when I talk about creative action, I do not mean manipulation. Manipulation is trying to bully someone into doing what you want them to do. In creative emotional action the response is free—which may not be obvious in that passage concerning Levin and Kitty, except for the fact that all their feelings come out into the open. If you look at some of the passages concerning Anna and Karenin, they have all sorts of murderously negative feelings that are not verbalized. In the example of Herbert Read, Graham Greene says that there was a change in the way people related to one another when Herbert Read entered the room. This was a free response, not something that they were bullied into. It is most important to distinguish between what is creative action that favours a free response and what is manipulation.

There is a demand in all of us for more than sheer survival. Nearly all of us here [at the lectures] have had psychotherapy. It means that we were dissatisfied, that we wanted more. If a great calamity occurred, if a nuclear bomb hit Sydney, and we

managed to live, we would be struggling for survival rather than going for psychotherapy. But 2,500 years later when we had recovered from the disaster, we might again be wanting more than just survival. There is a desire inherent in us that we be more than just passive receivers.

In a very good paper, "The Patient as Therapist to His Analyst", Harold Searles (1975) says that in everyone there is a need to heal. In other words, there is a need to change the other, and to change him or her in a particular way. He says that those of us who have become psychotherapists are tapping into a general need within the human being. He says that it is a matter of great distress to an infant who perceives that the mother is disturbed in some way—ill, as it were. In such a situation the infant attempts to heal her. He carries this through into the therapeutic situation, in that a patient will try to heal the therapist or the analyst.

What Kitty did, in rejecting Levin's attribution of mean motives to her, was a healing act in relation to him, in that it went against the narcissistic contemptuous attitude that he had held.

Ultimately—and Searle says this—this outer desire to heal is a symbol of the inner task, the task of bringing the different parts of ourselves into unity. Psychologists have pointed out the link between motivation and emotion. This is the true locus of healing. This is the emotional task. It is a truth that as a psychotherapist you cannot make an interpretation about someone's sadism, jealousy, or homosexuality if you are anxious about that thing in yourself. It cannot be done. This is the reason why supervision always has a limitation.

It is impossible to be the source of creative action when the different parts within us are not connected with one another. The parts only begin to cohere if the *lifegiver* is opted for, as opposed to the narcissistic option. The narcissistic option leads to an appearance of unity, but underneath there is disunity. Although the formulation is different, it is along the lines of what Winnicott talks about—the true self and the false self. The person in the narcissistic situation spends a great deal of energy trying to look as if he were acting in a coherent way when in fact he is not.

Defining the lifegiver

I now want to return to the question of what sort of an object the *lifegiver* is. As an analogy, most of us would agree that friendship is a reality—a reality that is inextricably bound to actual people. When one partner in a friendship dies, the friendship is over. And yet, is it over? There are two possibilities. If I had a great friend who died and I told you I talked with them every night, you would probably say, "Neville is going off his head a bit". On the other hand, if I said that when my friend had died, that was the end of it, there was nothing, you would also think me a bit peculiar. The lines of a poet come to mind:

*Tell me how love comes?
It comes unsought, unspent.
Tell me how love goes?
That was not love that went.*

Friendship is a psychological reality that exists in two people, and yet it is not entirely contained in them. The *lifegiver* is an object of this kind. It is a psychic object that cannot exist independently of a breast, a mother, a vagina, a penis, a father. As another analogy, take the word "shape". A shape cannot exist except in the material that fashions it, but it is not the material itself.

The *lifegiver* is real and is essential to our mental life, in the same way as we might say that friendship is an essential ingredient of human happiness. The big question is, "How does the *lifegiver* come into being?"

CHAPTER FOUR

The intentionality of the self

I said earlier that the intentional core of the self is able to turn against this object that I have named the *lifegiver*. It is able to repudiate it, to turn its back upon it. In terms of psychoanalytic theorists, we are probably closer here to Fairbairn (1976) than to any other. He said that the ego can say, "I am going to have nothing to do with this object", yet because of the survival instinct it is impossible for the self to repudiate it entirely. If one accepts the idea of the *lifegiver* being the source of emotional life and also the source of biological survival—that the two are linked—then the self can never effect a total repudiation, and so a split takes place, with one part of the self turning against the *lifegiver*. As the *lifegiver* is incorporated into the self, a division and a repudiation of the self's own nature occurs, resulting in an anti-relational position being taken. It is somewhat like a prisoner saying, "I am going to have nothing to do with these prison warders", but having to have something to do with them in order to receive meals and so on, or he will die.

This turning away from the *lifegiver* forms the core of narcissism. Narcissism is not in one part or in another part,

but in the way in which one part of the self relates to the others. It is similar to a situation in which one of you offends me, and I turn away and say to myself, "I won't speak to him again". In fact, I am forced to speak to you, because we keep meeting, so I say to myself, "I'll speak to him, I'll smile at him and be polite, but in my heart I will have nothing to do with him".

The *lifegiver* comes into being *through being chosen*—a little as friendship comes into being through two people turning towards each other. Colour is perhaps a more useful analogy. As we know, colour is only there when we see it. The eye and the brain convert light waves into colours, the colour blue, for instance, coming into being at a different rate from red, and so on. Colour comes into being through a perceptual action. The option makes the *lifegiver*. The paradox is that it has independent existence and yet does not exist without being opted for.

To return to the situation in which I say, "I will speak to that person, because I must, but in my heart I will have nothing to do with him", this suggests that I can divorce my presented self from my own heart—from what I think, from what I desire. Whenever there is such a divorce, the inner person is exceedingly vulnerable and susceptible. It is therefore very difficult for such a person to persevere in any sort of situation that might reverse the process for them.

When I was in England, I had a patient once whom I saw on the National Health Service. In London the number of psychodynamic psychotherapy vacancies in the health service are few, with the result that people who are badly off have great difficulty obtaining that sort of psychotherapy. This patient was referred to the clinic where I was working, and it was quite clear right from the initial interview that she did not like me. However, she said to herself (I think), "I shall have to make the best of it with this man. I am ill, and I am determined to get better." That decision was a healthy step for her and, I believe, the beginning of her repudiation of narcissism. It is significant that she was desperate and that there was a healthy striving in her.

This was in contrast to another occasion, when a woman came to see me and told me of the different psychotherapists whom she had wanted to see, and that they never had a vacancy for her. So I asked her, "Are you free on Monday morn-

ings at 10 o'clock?" (This was a Friday.) She told me she was, so I said, "How about starting this Monday?" She agreed, but she never turned up. She stayed stuck in the "life is unfair to me" mode. She was attached to the complaint that there was never a psychotherapist who wanted to see her. She had scorned the *lifegiver*, scorned opportunity when it offered itself.

This turning away from the *lifegiver* is a turning against the self. Life is potential for growth. Mystics and spiritual writers say that you either advance or regress—you cannot stand still. You can never say, "Well, now I have arrived at my goal, and I can stay here for the rest of my life". The psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion said that it is a fateful day when someone "settles into middle age". Choice is always confronting the individual.

The origin of the turning away from the lifegiver

The narcissistic person is someone who has turned against the *lifegiver*, and I think this occurs early in infancy. At the very early stage, the mother is the source of food, drink, and shelter to the infant, and the infant is totally dependent upon her. The infant's close bonding with the mother is well described by Frances Tustin (1972). When a separation or disruption occurs, the infant may respond by turning away from the mother and turning in upon itself. What I want to emphasize is that there is an intentional element in the infantile response.

I have discussed this with several people engaged in infant observation at the Tavistock Clinic in London, and they have told me that they are convinced that certain situations occur in early infancy in which the infant has the option to go one way or another; sometimes one path is chosen, sometimes another.

I want to give an example from the psychotherapy of a child aged eight who was a school phobic and exceedingly delinquent in his behaviour. He would throw water all round the psychotherapy room, destroy any toys that the therapist put out for him, urinate on the floor, try to lift the psychotherapist's skirt, try to break windows to get out of the room, and so on. All the psychotherapist could do was to draw boundaries: there were certain things she would not allow. After about six months in

therapy, shortly before a break, the child took a piece of paper and a pencil and drew a face with two tears coming from the eyes. It was clearly a baby's face, as there were two small teeth in the lower jaw. The picture was drawn with lightning speed, and he then immediately went back to his usual mocking and wrecking behaviour. The psychotherapist understood the picture to be the infant in the child that was sad at the coming parting, which was quickly covered over by a mocking bully. It was the first time the child had done anything as constructive as a drawing, and it was the first time, too, that he had stopped his wrecking behaviour, even for a minute.

In the very next session the boy devised a game in which he invited the psychotherapist to join. In this game he turned the psychotherapist into a shopkeeper and named a couple of objects as being two coins. He wanted to proffer one, but he said that the shopkeeper had said to him that if he gave her all his money, both coins, he would get a reward. This would be rather a risk, he said, because the shopkeeper might be tricking him. He hesitated, then gave both his coins over, looking at the psychotherapist as he handed them to her. He then went back to an area of the room which he referred to as "home". After waiting—another first, he had never before waited or paused—he rolled a big truck full of goods from the shop to his home. The psychotherapist told me that the therapy changed course from that day on and became calmer and more civilized.

The coins that the child proffered seemed to represent an inner giving of himself—a risk, a choice. There was a risk that things might have turned out badly—this was a choice of the *lifegtwer*. It had a beneficial outcome in that the boy became calmer and less anxious. The therapy did change, and I think what was dramatized in the game, which had been preceded by the drawing of the baby's sad face, was a foreshadowing of the calmer attitude that prevailed over the next few months. In this way the game functioned as a dream sometimes does.

When we are talking of the inner life of human beings we are talking of something that is unknown. The temporal and spatial categories that apply to the three-dimensional world are inadequate, so we fashion myths to help us towards understanding. Because they are myths, this does not mean that they are untrue—it means that they are analogical in nature.

Myths are our way of talking of a reality that we cannot know directly. The philosopher Immanuel Kant made the distinction between *noumenon* and *phenomenon*. The *noumenon* is the reality that we can never know directly, whereas the *phenomenon* is its manifestation, with which we have contact. If you put a saucepan of water on an electric ring and you see steam rising a few minutes later, you know that the electric ring is hot, without seeing the ring itself.

Human beings have always created myths about origins—cosmogonies. We may smile patronizingly at some of the cosmogonies of primitive peoples, but the big bang theory is also a cosmogony. We need to make sense of the present, to make meaning, and we also need to make sense of our own individual lives. Psychoanalytic developmental theories, in which we posit particular things happening in infancy and their results, are myths. What I am presenting now is a cosmogony to give meaning to the narcissistic condition. In order to draw an analogy with what is happening in the infant, it is useful to raise the story to the level of the adult world, particularly in the area of love relations, and then read it back into childhood. Many great novels can be read in this way.

The myth of Cassius

A young man called Cassius was lost in the outback. He wandered this way and that but was unable to find his way back to human habitation. He feared he would die. Then he came to a fertile glade. Around him he found trees laden with luscious fruit of all kinds, and there was a well with beautiful, clear, bubbling water. So satisfied was he with his surroundings that he gave up the idea of trying to find his way back to civilization. He spent all his days roaming in the glade, sleeping, eating, and drinking. As quickly as he ate the fruit, new ones ripened. Even sexually he was at peace: whenever the sexual urge arose in him, a nymph appeared and fondled him in all the places that gave him pleasure. Then he would fall asleep, and the nymph would vanish. The nymph also ministered to him in other ways. When he longed for music, the nymph would play beautiful

music for him on a variety of instruments. When he wanted literature, the nymph would read to him as he lay back in a cool bower. He passed his days in blissful abandon and believed himself to be the luckiest man in the universe.

When Cassius had been living in the glade for about a year, he woke up one morning with a headache, and the nymph was unable to do anything about it. He began to feel a strange restlessness. He could not understand what it was he wanted. He wandered around the glade, eating fruit, drinking the sparkling water, but he was dissatisfied. Just as he was going to sleep, he realized that he was longing for a friend. He knew the myth of Narcissus, so the next morning he went and looked at himself in the water, but he still felt lonely. He even tried shouting, to hear an echo, but that offered no comfort either. The next day when he woke, he decided that he would walk in a straight line out of the glade, until he found someone. "I am bored with myself," he said. He walked and walked until he came to a broad stream, and on the stream he saw a girl rowing a boat. He called to her and asked her her name.

"My name is Miriam", she called back.

"Please come to me", he called. So she rowed up close to him. "Take me in your boat", he begged. "I want to be your friend."

"But you don't know me", she said.

"Tell me where you live", he pleaded.

"I live a long way from here, in a garden I've constructed all by myself with great effort. I've built a canal from this river to water the garden. Each day I get up and put manure on the desert soil. I dig and I plant seeds, and I harvest the wheat, grind the grains, and make flour. Each day I bake bread. I grow fruit trees. I have made a violin out of the wood of a chestnut tree: I fashioned the strings from hemp soaked in resin. I play the violin after I have tended the garden. Then in the afternoon I sit down at a desk in the little house that I have made, and I write my novel. In the evening I cook myself a meal."

"Let me join you", said Cassius.

"I have worked hard to build my garden", Miriam replied. "I'll only let you come provided you give me a baby."

"I don't mind giving you a baby", said Cassius.

"Then I will tend the baby, and you will have to rise early in the morning, and you will have to fertilize the soil, and you will have to bake the bread, and you will have to play the violin to me while I'm feeding our baby."

"I can do all that", said Cassius breezily.

"One last thing I must tell you", said Miriam. "It's the law of the outback. Once I take you in my boat across the river I shall burn the boat, and you can never return to your glade, and you will have lost it forever."

Cassius frowned at this, and his frown summoned the nymph. "What do you want that for?" asked the nymph. "I can give you all that she can give. When you want music, I give it to you. When you want sex, I provide it. When you want beautiful literature, I read it to you in a tuneful voice. When you want food, it is there in luxurious abundance in the glade."

The nymph led him back around the glade and showed him all that he would lose. The nymph was cunning. "You can have all that she offers without having to leave the glade, without having to cross the river. I'll show you." The nymph then rubbed Cassius' body all over with a perfumed unguent and said, "Now, if you call whatever name you care, the most beautiful companion will come to you."

Cassius thought for a moment. He wanted to call out "Miriam", but the word did not come out as he intended. Instead, it came out as "Marian". Instantly, a beautiful girl appeared who accompanied him everywhere. For a year he lived in the glade with Marian, but then one morning when he awoke he found that she had vanished. Only then did he remember Miriam. He rushed to the river where he had seen her in the boat and called out. Miriam came in her boat, but she said that it was too late. She had found another man and now had a baby. Cassius returned to the glade, went straight to the well, and drowned himself.

An interpretation of the myth

In interpreting the myth, I want to focus on the element of refusal. Why did the nymph have such a hold over Cassius? The temptation is to concentrate upon the erotic paradise that

the nymph offered him. This is important, and I will look at that when I focus on the aspect of narcissism in which the self is taken as its own erotic object. Here I want to return to the principle of what is not done.

Cassius believed that he had everything, but what he did not have was the capacity to give out of his own self. To put it more accurately, he *believed* he did not have this capacity. Had he crossed the river in that boat, he would have had to face the fact that all that he had known previously had been make-believe. Here was someone on the other side of the river who knew much more about the business of generating from within than he did. In order to cross the river and undertake what Miriam had suggested, he would have had to learn from her—be a child, as it were. Such an act of humility was abhorrent to him. He preferred to stay in isolation, so he dreamed up a perfect Marian. One of the dominant notes of narcissism is an absolute hatred of being small, being at the beginning, of opening oneself to someone who can show one something.

The difference between Miriam and Cassius is that Cassius *finds himself* in a paradise, whereas Miriam has constructed her garden out of her own self. Melanie Klein says—I believe correctly—that the object of envy, of that sigh of hatred, is the individual's creativity. Cassius admires the product of Miriam's action, but he hates the intentional activity that is the agent of what she has produced. This hatred is not known. It is hidden in a secret chamber of our being.

There is a good illustration of this in *Anna Karenina* (Tolstoy, 1986), when Vronsky and Anna are in Italy and Vronsky has taken up painting.

After hesitating for some time which style of painting to take up—religious, historical, *genre*, or realistic—he set to work. He appreciated all the different styles and could find inspiration in any of them, but he could not conceive that it was possible to be ignorant of the different schools of painting and to be inspired directly by what is within the soul, regardless of whether what is painted will belong to any recognized school. And I think that's the key, the rule to it. Since he did not know this, and drew his inspiration not directly from life but indirectly from other painters' interpretations of life, he found inspiration very readily and

easily; and equally readily and easily produced paintings very similar to the particular style he was trying to imitate. [p. 491]

Tolstoy is saying that Vronsky was not inspired directly from within his soul, so while his work might have looked all right, there was a fundamental difference between what he produced and what we might call the genuine, healthy article.

As I mentioned earlier, one of the difficult things about narcissism as a character structure is that the whole of the individual's efforts are geared to hiding the reality of the situation, both from himself and from others. Next, Vronsky finds the painter Mihailov, who does a portrait of Anna. Vronsky then loses interest in his own painting and agrees with his friend Golenishchev, who says that Mihailov was envious of him, a wealthy man of high rank in society, who was able to paint as well as someone who has given his whole life to painting. Tolstoy suggests, however, that the real reason for Vronsky leaving off painting his portrait of Anna was that he envied Mihailov's ability to paint from the soul. That is the heart of it. This ties in with what I have been saying about the *lifegiver*. If the *lifegiver* is opted for then it becomes a principle of action within. It comes into being within the self in the act of being chosen, of being desired.

Cassius hates the inner creativity he sees in Miriam and his hatred makes him indecisive. He is beckoned to go across the river, but he cannot do it. There is an instance of this sort of situation in *Anna Karenina* when Levin's brother Koznyshev comes to stay with Levin and Kitty and starts to pay court to Varenka. It is quite clear that he wants to propose to her, and that Varenka wants him to. They are alone, picking mushrooms. The moment has arrived, but he just cannot do it. Something holds him back—a basic refusal.

Consider Cassius as an infant and Miriam as a productive mother or, perhaps more accurately, the *lifegiver*. Cassius admires Miriam. The infant admires his mother's creative capacity, her capacity to generate from inside herself, but beneath the admiration is a bitter envy. Cassius fashions an illusory Miriam—Marian—but Marian is an illusion. Marian is part of Cassius. Cassius submerges his intentional self in the illusory construction, and so he sabotages his intentional self.

He commits self-murder, a psychological suicide. He becomes the admired figure in phantasy. This is the origin of narcissism. There is self-murder in Vronsky's copying, his merging into the tonality of the other.

A quite frequent device, typified in that story of Vronsky, is the denial of what the person actually secretly envies. Things are turned around, and the person generates envy. In this type of situation the person dominated by narcissistic currents generates envy in those around, and then they can identify with that external envy, avoiding experiencing any of the hateful destruction of the self that goes on inside. I once knew a history lecturer who gave very accomplished lectures at university, and when colleagues said to him, "Heavens, you must have worked hard to produce that lecture", he would just say with a nonchalant air, "Oh no, I just thought it out last night while I was in the bath". It was not true, of course, but it stimulated a type of transitory envy that enabled him to get away from what was terribly destructive in himself. This aspect is seen very clearly in Vronsky.

In those tragic pages before Anna commits suicide, all her efforts go into trying to detect whether or not Vronsky loves her, rather than into creative activity that might bring that as a result.

It is this short-cut that I try to bring out in the myth of Cassius, the short-cut of not doing what is necessary in order for the desired outcome actually to happen. One of the most fundamental narcissistic complaints is, "Nobody loves me". People may or may not love someone, but if they do love someone—or if they hate someone, for that matter—it is the result of an action.

At some very early stage in infancy, then, there is this refusal of the *lifegiver*, and the "I" turns and takes its own self as a love object. But, as I said, this is not absolutely correct. For better or worse, the infant self is compelled to opt for the *lifegiver* because of the threat of death, so at the same time a split in the self occurs, and another part repudiates this option. The result of this is that only part of the self has within it the source of action and the source of coherence. How much of the *lifegiver* as a source of action within is actually available will

depend on the degree to which this split has occurred—how much of the self has repudiated the *lifegiver*.

I have implied throughout that there are two kinds of action issuing from the personality, and this also comes out in the myth. One of these occurs when Cassius summons the nymph, and the other when Miriam actually does something—digs a canal, waters the garden, and so on. In one an external agent is summoned to achieve something, in the other the self is actually the agent of the action. One act is manipulative, the other is truly creative. Cassius is manipulative in summoning the nymph. And the most extreme sort of creative action is that described by Graham Greene, writing about Herbert Read. Both modes of action exist in any one person, but they will vary greatly in degree.

I may believe that I have become an analyst when an Institute of Psychoanalysis declares that I am one, or that I have become married because the registrar at the Registry Office declares me married, but this is really magic. There is a by-passing of the personal creative action that has to take place. If I have taken this narcissistic step and have buried myself in the image of another—if I have not got inside me that basic source of action in the psyche, and have turned off from the child in me—then I have put myself into a grandiose self. The grandiose self is extremely vulnerable, and one of its most recognizable features is that if I am insulted, or if something does not go my way, I make a great fuss, because I am a king who has been frustrated.

If this act of refusal has taken place, and, like Vronsky, there is no inspiration from within, how am I going to cope with the crises of life? How am I going to get by? The taking of the self as an erotic object is a substitute way of generating action.

CHAPTER FIVE

The erotization of the self

The psyche is the source of action, and it is helpful to divide this action into what we might call motor activity, which is geared to survival, and emotional activity, which enables us to relate to others. This division is not entirely satisfactory, for the two interpenetrate. There are circumstances, for instance, in which our survival depends on our capacity to act emotionally in such a way that we are in satisfactory contact with the human beings around us, so that we obtain food and shelter.

*Overcoming fear is
the sphere of emotional activity*

Emotional activity is always a challenge. Human beings have a natural tendency to be frightened of each other. When you go to a party and find yourself next to a stranger, you tend to ask rather vacuous questions, such as "Where do you live?" in an attempt to overcome feelings of anxiety. In time someone comes

and puts a drink into your hand, and you calm down a bit. I remember listening to a program by an analyst called Eva Rosenfeld, who knew Freud and his household when they were in Vienna, and she said their custom was not to offer guests a drink but to tell a joke to put them at ease.

I am frightened of all of you; I am frightened of my parents; I am frightened of my boss and of those who work under me; I am frightened of my wife, my children, my patients. This fear of each other is a fear of the unknown, both in the other and in ourselves. Bion said once that if you are not frightened of the patient who is going to come into your consulting room, then there must be something wrong, because it suggests that you know what is going to emerge. And if you know, then what is the point of having the encounter? To overcome this state of affairs, this fear, is the emotional task.

Enticing others to be the source of action

I was saying earlier that the person dominated by narcissistic currents has turned away from the *lifegiver*—his source of action has been smothered. He does not relate to the other, yet he cannot survive without relating to the other. To survive in the human community, he has at least to give the appearance of being able to manage human intimacy, and the pathway that is open is through erotizing the self. Essentially, this means that figures from the outside have to be enticed to be the individual's source of action.

A person dominated by narcissistic currents is without the capacity to initiate action—judgement, thinking, perception—so he derives this capacity by putting on the cloak of another.

There is a particular sort of person who survives through being able to sense the emotional tone of the other. Such a person coming to an analyst or therapist will try to insinuate himself into the therapist's emotional way of looking at things—into the therapist's understanding and attitudes—so that after a period of time the patient seems to be functioning very well, and the therapist is pleased. What has happened is that the patient has ingested the therapist's way of seeing things into

the surface of the personality, but the inner emotional self is in fact very hostile. I am sure this is one of the main reasons for cases where everything blows up some time after treatment.

Remember that the one who says yes to the *lifegiver* has incorporated a source of action. The act of incorporation means that the individual has a mental principle within, and thus the capacity to rise above the conditioning of the social environment. In other words, the person is not totally ruled by sense impressions or by moods from within. The "I" in this situation has the inner resources to go out and meet sense impressions and make what one might call a negotiated relationship with them.

By refusing the *lifegiver*, the individual has refused the inner principle of coherence, so he has the threefold problem of generating action, binding himself into a unity, and contending with the outside world.

Guilt about manipulating people

This brings us to another important point: the taking of the self as an erotic object brings guilt in its train. There is guilt about manipulating people. Below the level of consciousness, the person feels bad.

I have experienced this clinically in situations where I realized that I was being manipulated. Sometimes the manipulation is quite subtle, as in being required to keep making soothing comments. On becoming aware of being manipulated, I have stopped, and the patient has quite quickly been less persecuted. For instance a patient who has always spoken about her husband persecuting her will then report that he does not seem to be so persecuting. In other words, she has not had to co-opt him in the same way.

I will now return to some of the thinking about the composite self. A part of the self has initiated this refusal—the part that is an infant. This infant is the core of the self, the source of intentionality and action within the personality. This part has the power to drag other parts of the personality with it. Figures in the external world are also brought in to collaborate with it.

For instance, in the therapeutic situation, if the analyst finds that he is being subtly controlled, it always means that he is experiencing what is actually being done to the emotional core of the patient's self.

It is intolerable to go through life feeling absolutely terrible inside. One of the prime ways to alleviate the bad feelings is to co-opt people to keep telling me that I am doing fine. Freud says, in *The Future of an Illusion* (1927c), that one of the tragedies about neuroses is that they take up so much energy that could be available for creative use. The same principle operates here. I expend quantities of energy on trying to alleviate the bad feelings and hiding what is going on. I am constantly employing people close to me to give me a boost. I may make a great display of concern about them, but at the emotional level I am completely callous, I do not care at all. It is shameful. Society also frowns upon it. Society dictates that we have concern for others, and here I am, with "me" at the centre of the universe, so I must hide it. (I develop further the hiding of this inner state of affairs when I talk about the phenomenology of narcissism.) I have shut out the route to health; I am not able to be the source of my own action. Somehow I have to engineer energy to steer myself through the web of human relationships that make up life. I have often had patients say to me that although they have been successful in various ways, they feel that they have conned their way through, that they are frauds. They feel that the principle under which they operate is not genuine.

Stroking and stimulation

The source of action in the healthy person is from within. The source of action in the narcissistic person is at the surface. The surface has to generate action through getting figures within and without to *stroke* and *stimulate* this surface.

Remember that I have become the admired figure, but I am not relating to that figure. I have cancelled out the relationship by merging with it, by becoming it, so the envy of the figure is not experienced. However, the hostility towards the envied

figure is then displaced onto another, or others. I have become the envied figure on a false basis.

The problem of having a vacuum at the centre is that there is no sustenance from within—what in old-fashioned language is referred to as “strength of character”. So I have to be stroked, but the stroking only rubs the surface. I have to be stimulated, but that also only excites the surface. In either instance, the effects do not last. The pleasure of someone stroking me may carry me through for a while, but then I have to return for another one. It is like short-term memory—you give me your telephone number, and while it is still ringing in my ears I dial the number; but if I dial it wrongly, then I have to come back and ask you for the number again. With long-term memory I actually commit the number to memory. It is inside, and I do not forget it.

Stroking and stimulation are both sensual images. We are probably all familiar with Freud’s erotogenic zones—the mouth, the anus, and the genitals. Freud also formulated an interconnection between these zones, which was developed more fully by Ferenczi. Ferenczi referred to this interconnection as *amphimixis*, which leads to the idea of a unified pleasure centre. It is through this pleasure centre that the narcissistic person generates the impetus for action.

The self can be erotized through stimulating the erotogenic zones oneself, or by getting another to do it; but even when the subject does it himself, he has to drum up a fantasy of another who performs for him. It is different from the healthy situation, where there is a mental object within. This is a sensual object, not a mental object. The pleasure centre—the self—has to be constantly stimulated, so that the person solves the problem of action. It is like a masturbatory activity that has to be constantly renewed.

The erotic is the fantasy-correlate of the sexual, and it does not necessarily involve physical touch. The erotic refers to the self, the sexual to the bodily zones. We have here a self with a vacuum, and its way of generating energy to negotiate emotional encounters is through erotizing the self. It is the self without a vital principle. It is a jelly-like self. Frances Tustin (1972), when talking of autistic children, uses the analogy of

someone with an exoskeleton—no internal structure, no vital principle within.

Examples of stroking

What are the ways by which I erotize my selfhood? I am on a long journey, and in order to accomplish it, I need to be stroked: my travelling companion needs to tell me how well I am doing. I am an actor, and I have been acting in a play: I need to be told how well I have performed. After one performance no one praises me, and I feel depressed and sour, so I go round to some friends and I smoke a few joints, drink quite a lot, and tell the company that no one complimented me. They all tell me how well I have done and how miserable the producer and my fellow actors are. (In this type of situation there is always a type of paranoia generated.) That keeps me going for a couple of days, but then I need another pick-me-up dose from my friends. I cannot manage without constant strokes, so I manoeuvre myself into a group where I will get them all the time. I will avoid company that does not support me. I cannot sustain an endeavour without my companions.

Of course, there are other things from which I can obtain strokes to keep me going: drugs, sexual affairs. These give me a burst of new life, but it does not last. Not long ago I read P. G. Wodehouse's *The Inimitable Jeeves* (1985), and there is a character in it called Bingo who on about every third page meets a wonderful new woman who is going to save his life and is better than any woman he has ever met before, and then of course it flops.

Frequently there is a contract between people dominated by narcissistic currents: "I'll stroke you and keep you going, and you stroke me." Sometimes a relationship breaks down when one person takes steps to escape from his or her narcissism. Such a change poses a problem for the people in the immediate environment. Either the partner has to respond to the change and develop emotionally, or a rupture of some sort takes place.

The inability to manage anything unpleasant

It is fine to praise someone for a good piece of work. There is only a problem when I have to have praise, so much so that I do not even do the work in order to get it. I referred earlier to Anna Karenina's behaviour just before she commits suicide. She is totally preoccupied with whether or not Vronsky loves her, but has she done anything to earn his love?

I have talked about co-opting others into stroking, but of course I can do quite a lot myself. I can stroke myself with pleasing sounds, smells, sights. All of this is all right; it is the basis of the aesthetic sense. Again, we need to fall back on the principle of omission. It is when I cannot face anything unpleasant, anything painful (remember, all the energy is directed to the pleasure centre), but take flight *into* these that there is a problem. As the energy that is generated is not put into the venture itself, the real emotional self is left unsatisfied. I knew a woman once who was bright and cheerful when her husband was in good form, when he was successful in his job, but as soon as anything went wrong in his life she became depressed and could not ride out the storm. She could not manage pain or crises.

I read in a biography of Napoleon that he was unable to discipline a subordinate unless he had someone in the room as an audience. One would have thought that Napoleon would have been able to tell someone off without difficulty. In fact, a good many so-called great people in history have been like that.

The excitement of killing

I have been stressing the need for stroking. The other way of erotizing the self is through stimulation. Something really exciting may keep me going for quite a while.

I want to say something particular about excitement. It is very exciting to kill. I once interviewed an adolescent boy, and he told me how he had managed to get a piece of gellignite and

had blown up a tree-stump in the garden. As he told me about it, a gleam came into his eyes that was unmistakable. When the hunter fires at a high-flying duck and sees it explode in the air, feathers radiating in all directions, and then sees it crash into the water, he experiences a thrill of excitement. He relates the incident to his friends over lunch, who cheer with approval. Chimpanzees are mostly vegetarian, but occasionally they kill a bush buck. Sometimes they will also go out in a group and kill a colobus monkey, pulling it apart, limb from limb. At the moment they catch the monkey they scream with delight—a scream that goes through the entire group.

In the Second World War, when the Americans dropped two atomic bombs on Japan, the first on Hiroshima and the second on Nagasaki, the members of the crew that was detailed to drop the second bomb, six days after the first one, were in a frenzy lest Japan surrender before they had dropped this bomb. The excitement of dropping it was extreme. If there is a road accident, we all stop and stare, especially if there is blood. When, in the French Revolution, Louis XVI was to be executed, they placed the guillotine at a special bend in the river Seine, so that the largest possible crowd could watch. On one occasion I was in a bar and heard a man telling a group of people with absolute delight about the way he had taken a cosh, when he was a policeman, and had broken the skull of a West Indian. I am talking here about the *common* excitement that is generated through maiming and killing, not the extreme perversion of people like Idi Amin, Hitler, and Queen Ranavalona of Madagascar.

The same excitement is generated by self-killing, by cruelty to the self. Although this excitement is generated below the threshold of awareness, my clinical experience convinces me that this is so. When there is sadism going on at that level, it is difficult to give it up. It is like a drug. I think that cruelty of this sort always accompanies the narcissistic situation. To return to what I said at the beginning, we do not get positive narcissism without self-hatred. This point has been emphasized by Christopher Lasch, in his book *The Culture of Narcissism* (1991). The basic problem of the person is how to generate the psychic energy to get through when the mental object is smothered.

Cruelty to another and the self is well illustrated in *Anna Karenina*. At times Anna and Karenin absolutely persecute each other. If I had the choice of treating either Anna or Karenin, I would choose Anna. With Karenin, everything is denied—all the problems lie in Anna. He would be a nightmare to treat because there would be no acknowledgement that there was anything wrong. Anna does know that there is something wrong. With self-righteousness there is always pleasure being taken in emotionally destructive and sadistic acts; self-righteousness is a form of dissociation.

Destructiveness and dissociation

When people are very destructive to their own selves, dissociation is often extreme, and this affects the people in the environment. I was once supervising a group of clinicians, one of whom was treating an extremely difficult man. At one stage the therapist reported that during his sessions the patient was taking a pistol out, playing with it, putting it to his head, and almost pulling the trigger. This had a numbing effect on the therapist and on the group. This numbing is the transferred effect of dissociation.

In the myth of Narcissus, the old blind seer Teiresias said that Narcissus would live long, so long as he did not know himself. These exciting, destructive acts *must not be known*—they are too guilt-producing for the person's psychological make-up to bear.

The phenomenology of narcissism

So far I have described the processes that give rise to narcissism, but I have not truly described narcissism itself. It may seem more sensible to have started with a description, but I thought we would have a greater chance of grasping its nature if we first understood some of its components.

I have emphasized that a person governed by inner currents of narcissism always tries to conceal it. Narcissism never stands nakedly in the open. This is another difference between selfishness and self-centredness. People are quite often openly, unashamedly selfish, but self-centredness is always hidden. Narcissism always has to be flushed out. Paradoxically, when it is flushed out, its structure is changed in the act. When people begin to grasp the narcissistic elements in themselves, these elements will already be losing their hold. One sees this clearly in the clinical situation where something has arisen as a result of narcissistic currents—say, extreme jealousy. When the patient becomes aware of his jealousy—he might have a dream about it—he is already entering into some relationship with it, so its strength will be diminishing.

Narcissism is a mentality

When narcissism is flushed out, what do we see? What are we looking for? Where do we expect to find it? We are looking for a mentality. It is enormously important to grasp this. A mentality is one's mental attitude to both inner and outer events. One's mental attitude to an event constitutes an essential aspect of the event itself. People might say, "You can't change the facts of your history". That is not true—you can. The facts of people's histories change as a result of a changed mentality. It is like a chemist changing a compound by adding an ingredient or removing one.

It is difficult to find the mentality because it is hidden. The place where it is hidden is in the web of an individual's relationships both within and without. The confusion between inner and outer is one of the ways in which the narcissistic aspect hides itself. For instance, I am sorry for myself, but instead of perceiving it in relation to myself I locate it in another, or others, so that it looks as if it is outside. I may devote a large part of my life to others for whom I feel sorry. In this way narcissism can masquerade as self-sacrifice and devotion. (It is interesting to ask whether the nature of the motivation affects the act itself. The pragmatist will say that as long as the job is done, it does not make any difference what has motivated the doer.)

*The ways in which
narcissism can be hidden*

A man discovers that his wife has had an affair, so he decides to have one too. On the face of it, that may sound reasonable. After all, what can the wife expect? But the question is, what is the mental process that has led to this? It goes something like this: "My wife's had an affair, so why shouldn't I?" What might he have done instead? He might have tried to find out why his wife felt the need to have an affair. But one of the cardinal aspects of narcissism is that self-knowledge is to be avoided at all costs. There is a fundamental terror of looking in, and so

there is a terror of asking, "Why has she had this affair?" If he asks himself that question seriously, avenues of possibility open out. A discussion about it might be heated and angry, and many painful things might be said, but something more fruitful might develop between husband and wife. Or a recognition might emerge that the marriage is at an end, and each partner might then go forward to something more fruitful. To all these possibilities the husband reacts with a sour "no". The mentality is, "What's the point?" Something upsetting happens; "OK, I'll do the same"; "I can't be bothered"; "Why should I?"

One can imagine a marriage counsellor saying to this man, "Have you thought of trying to speak to your wife?" He then says, "No there's no point. I know what she'll say." And, of course, one can approach someone and speak in such a way, in such a tone, that they will probably react just as one has predicted. "See? I told you it would be hopeless." There is always a shrinking from confrontation. Confrontation is painful and may bring about change.

Karenin epitomizes this attitude in the passage in *Anna Karenina*, when he is in the carriage with Anna after Vronsky has fallen from his horse in the race, and the horse has had to be put down. Anna reluctantly goes in the carriage with Karenin back to the estate:

She took her seat in her husband's carriage in silence and in silence they drove out of the crowd of vehicles. In spite of all he had seen, Karenin would still not allow himself to think of his wife's real state. He merely saw the outward signs. He saw that she had behaved unbecomingly and considered it his duty to tell her so. But it was very difficult for him to say that and nothing more. He opened his mouth to tell her she had behaved in an unseemly fashion but against his will said something quite different. [p. 230]

A little bit later, just before she finally reveals things:

She did not hear half of what he was saying, she felt afraid before him and was wondering whether it was true that Vronsky was not killed. Was it of him they were speaking when they said the rider was not hurt but the horse had broken its back? She merely smiled with a pretence of irony

when he finished, and made no reply because she had not heard what he said. Karenin had begun to speak boldly, but when he realized plainly what he was speaking of, the dismay she was feeling communicated itself to him. He saw her smile and a strange delusion possessed him.

"She is smiling at my suspicions. In a moment she will tell me what she told me the other time: that there is no foundation for my suspicions, that it's ridiculous."

Now that the revelation of everything was hanging over him, there was nothing he wanted so much as that she would answer derisively, as she had before, that his suspicions were ridiculous and groundless. What he knew was so terrible that now he was ready to believe anything. But the expression of her frightened, sombre face did not now hold out hope even of deception. [p. 231]

Karenin cannot bear the thought of the coming confrontation. He cannot bear to face what he knows, because if he does he will have to ask himself, "Why is this happening, and what shall I do?" He takes up the role of the innocent, the wronged man, and almost rejoices in self-righteousness. Later on his friends support his self-righteous woundedness all the time. Marital therapists talk of one person carrying something for the other. It is quite clear that Anna carries this for Karenin. That is part of her problem. Why does she carry it for him?

Compare Karenin and Anna with Stiva and Dolly. The book opens with Dolly having discovered that Oblonsky has had an affair with the French governess. Dolly confronts him with an incriminating note. If Karenin had found an incriminating note, he would somehow have deluded himself into thinking that it had been written by someone else, or that it had nothing to do with him and Anna. Oblonsky reacts with a good deal of self-pity, but he does want to reopen relations with his wife, and Dolly takes some initiative in the situation.

If one accepts that growth in self-knowledge is always the product of psychic action, then without such initiatory action a person will stay stuck. Sour refusal will dominate their character. In his novel *Steppenwolf*, Hermann Hesse (1972) writes that the true suicide is not necessarily the person who has killed himself, but the person in whom the mental and emotional processes are deadened (pp. 58-60).

Receptivity to the other

One of the first stirrings of initiatory action is receptivity to the other. The person dominated by narcissistic currents is enclosed, shut off from the other. For those of us who are psychotherapists, this raises an important technical question. Most of us have been taught that what we do, most essentially, is to listen to what the patient is saying. But there is listening and listening. There is listening for what some people have called the music of what lies behind the actual communications, as opposed to necessarily listening to everything that is said. If what someone is saying is not coming from initiatory action but almost entirely from a passive state that is geared to getting others to act, or if they are speaking to block out communication, then it is of no value for the therapist to stay silent.

There is a view that when the patient is silent, the best response from the analyst is to stay silent also. If the patient's silence comes from a fear of initiating—if there is some inner threatening figure that makes a person frightened of the therapist or analyst—then it is no good if the analyst does the same. "Oh, OK, if you're going to be silent then I'll be silent too", like the man who had an affair because his wife had one. All of this is below the threshold of awareness, of course, but I do believe that in these situations therapists need to get in touch with their own thoughts, to allow their imaginations as free a rein as possible, and to speak from these thoughts. If two people are in a room in a fairly intimate encounter, then the thoughts and imaginative processes that are going on are nearly always influenced by the other. There is, therefore, a requirement on the therapist to speak these thoughts.

Just to give a simple example, a therapist may be sitting with a patient who is pouring out a great deal of stuff, and the therapist's actual thought may be, "I don't understand any of this. I feel very confused." That thought needs to be spoken, preferably in a way so as to convey some meaning. Numerous times, when supervising, I have asked the therapist, "What did you actually think?" The therapist tells me what he thought, but then says that he did not tell the patient this. Why is this so? He feels, I think, that it is too intimate, too upsetting, perhaps too harsh. I am convinced that if I allow myself to get into

a situation where a patient acts in such a way that I am shut out (and of course I represent the other), then the narcissism will remain untouched. If you have the thought, "I don't understand any of this, it seems like meaningless jabber to me", and tell the patient what you are thinking, it is likely to make some sort of rupture in the narcissistic current.

I heard recently of some work being done in the United States, monitoring the conversations of exceedingly disturbed narcissistic patients. What has emerged is that the speech patterns of the disturbed person interfere with the thought processes and natural communication processes of the other. Some inroads on a narcissistic way of being can be made when the analyst, with his or her own thoughts, makes some intervention that carries those thoughts.

Here is a simple example of the effectiveness of such intervention. I was once seeing a man who paid no attention whatever to anything I said to him. I drew his attention to the fact that he did this on numerous occasions. Initially he was describing the way his wife neglected him, and each time I made these interventions his accounts of his wife's behaviour would alter—his wife was paying more attention to him, and so on. If I had suggested, "Why don't you speak to your wife and encourage her to treat you better?" it would have been hopeless, because I would have been reacting to something rather than connecting with what the patient was doing emotionally. The analyst who takes the line that he or she is just going to be a passive receptacle leaves the person in their narcissistic state.

Speaking one's thoughts

It can take courage to say what you are thinking. I have sometimes had thoughts that seemed mad to me, and I have thought the patient would also think me mad if I spoke them, but I have gone ahead anyway, and it has usually been effective. It is the inhibition against speaking one's thoughts that needs to be overcome.

When I had not been qualified as an analyst long, I had a patient who came to me following a psychotic breakdown. My

training had not prepared me for such a patient, and it took me time to realize that she was hallucinating and her speech was describing hallucinatory images that she was seeing on the wall. My instinct was to keep communicating with her, and so I tried to make an imaginative response to these images that she was throwing out. I remember thinking that if anyone had seen us through a one-way screen and heard our extraordinary dialogue, we would both have been carted off to a mental hospital. Thoughts such as these inhibit us from speaking what needs to be spoken.

Our crazy dialogue went on for about three months, and one day I thought to myself, "I am fed up with this". I had no other clue with which to make an interpretation, other than thinking that I was being consciousness for her in this strange patterning that we were involved in. She was giving me discrete little telegraphic communications, and I was weaving them into a coherent story. The next time she started this, instead of doing what I usually did, I said, "You want me to build this into a meaningful structure because you think you are unable to do it yourself". Up to that point our dialogue had been empathic and warm, but she then became extraordinarily angry. I had been fitting in with something, and at that point I was no longer doing so. My interpretation was saying, effectively, "How about seeing if you could initiate and pattern some of this stuff for yourself?" It was my frustration with the situation that impelled me to make that interpretation—I declared that I was the other and was no longer going to be co-opted.

The attitude of turning off

Here is another example of narcissism. A boy comes home from school and asks his father to help him build a model aeroplane. His father says that he just has to make a telephone call, and he will come and make the plane with him in 20 minutes. The boy says, "Oh no, it doesn't matter. Don't bother." The boy doesn't get instant gratification of his wish, so he sabotages himself. "I don't want your help unless you do as I want." It is a petty "wantingness". If the boy had really wanted help with his

aeroplane he would have been prepared to wait. The gratification is in having it, "Now, when I want it." It gives the boy the satisfactory feeling of having his father as an extension of himself. When he does not get it, there is a rage but then a turning of the back on the rage and a pretence of not caring. The fundamental attitude is the turning off from. "I won't give myself the pleasure of making that aeroplane with my father."

Turning off is also illustrated graphically in the following passage from *Anna Karenina*. Again, it is about Karenin.

Since their conversation on the night of the Princess Tverskoy's party he had never spoken to Anna again of his suspicions and jealousy, and that habitual tone of his, as if he were mocking someone, could not have been better suited to his present attitude to his wife. He was a little colder to her. He simply appeared slightly displeased with her for that first midnight conversation which she had resisted. In his manner there was a shade of vexation, but nothing more. "You would not be open with me," he seemed to say, mentally addressing her; "so much the worse for you. The time will come when you will beg me to be open with you and I shall not listen. So much the worse for you!" he said mentally, like a man who, having vainly tried to extinguish a fire, might be annoyed at his vain exertions and say to it: "Go and burn then; it is your own fault!" [p. 219]

Karenin hates Anna but holds back any emotional connection with her. He keeps all his vengeful thoughts within, expressing his hatred in coldness. His basic emotional attitude is one of turning away from her. The great "Me" has been offended. If he had spoken his hatred, it would have been a step out of narcissism. Compare Karenin's behaviour with Dolly's when confronted with Oblonsky's infidelity. She is shattered, she hates him, and she expresses it.

Taking revenge

Because the narcissistic person does not consciously know that he has taken offence, the most elaborate forms of revenge can take place. For instance, at a university in England a man

failed to get the professorial job he was hoping for; his rival was appointed instead. Some time later, the defeated man put up a proposal to split the discipline into two departments. The rationale was elaborated in numerous documents, by working parties and so on. It was difficult, however, not to conclude that the motive force was to deprive his rival of some power, and to achieve greater power himself. And, in fact, that is what happened: two departments were created. Again we are back with that interesting question as to whether actions motivated by narcissism are as successful and fruitful as those with healthier motives.

*The child
that is not allowed to speak*

The negativity in narcissism is partly due to the fact that the disowned child part of the self, the spontaneous, emotional source within the personality—it may be a jealous child, an envious child, a resentful child—is not given a chance to speak. The person's inner feelings will be rooted in this infant but they are not expressed. Narcissistic people often complain that no one understands, and the expectation is that the therapist should understand without having been told anything. That is one of the most tell-tale signs. My psychotic patient thought that I should understand her without her making any effort to communicate. With this patient, Bion said to me, "You must tell her that if you are to function properly she must keep you informed".

As a therapist you may have some theoretical understanding, but you will never have an understanding that is alive—in relation to—unless some communication comes from the other. Sometimes a patient may make an effort to communicate, and you may fail to pick it up. It is extremely important to be able to differentiate between this sort of situation and that of the narcissist, who is not interested in communicating. The narcissistic person sees the therapist as a grandiose person who "knows", and that is what the therapist must resist. I said in exasperation once to a patient, "Imagine that I am an engine

driver who has never opened a book on psychology. Speak to me on that assumption."

In London a patient came to see me. He was in charge of a large social welfare agency, and he came, he said, because he wanted to get a better grasp of psychoanalytic concepts; he thought this would help him to manage his staff better. He said he would only come once a week because that was all he needed, and anyway he could not manage more than that because of his work commitments. (This sort of situation can put a therapist or analyst into a difficult position. Here is a man who wants treatment but is terrified of it, so he puts the analyst in a position where the psychoanalysis is almost doomed not to work.) When I took him on, I told him of the breaks that I took: ten days at Christmas, a week at Easter, and five weeks in August. As I told him, he said, "They're a long way off. I don't have to worry about them". Nevertheless, a panic-stricken look came into his eyes. I surmised that the breaks would be a big problem, formulating to myself that there was an extraordinarily dependent infant dominated by a grandiose adult who was saying, "You don't have to worry about that. You're above being upset."

Anyhow, what happened was that during the Christmas break he got into a drunken rage with his wife, and during the Easter break he had an affair. I held my breath in horror as to what he would do in the long break. No amount of interpretation had any effect on him. I realized that once a week was not enough to hold the infant. I tried to point out to him that the drunkenness and the affair resulted from the child in him being in a rage when I left him, but all to no avail.

When the August break came, he had a car crash a few days after his last session, and had to go into hospital for a few days. Luckily, he had only minor injuries. I learned about this when I returned, at which point he told me that he was going away for a month. I put it to him that he was going away because he was angry with me that I had been away for a month and left him to languish in hospital. He looked resentful, and in the next session he told me that he thought that what I had said had been out of order, and that he had decided to finish treatment. However, he also said that he felt much better, much more together than he had ever felt before, after the last session. He said

this was entirely due to him, and had nothing to do with anything that I had said. Oozing unction, he then went on to say how helpful I had been, what a lot he had learnt about psychoanalysis, and how useful it would be in managing his team.

There were two levels operating here. On the one level I had been very useful to him, but on the other—the one place where there had been some real help, in that the disowning adult was pushed back in favour of the infant for a moment—he was not prepared to acknowledge that I had done anything. The one helpful thing had to be owned by him.

This vignette shows the narcissistic inner situation: the grandiose part of the self that smothers the infant. The infant cannot manage the long break. The grandiose part takes over and cannot tolerate the infant taking a step. The grandiose part is invested in keeping the self fixed, and we are left with a pseudo-maturity.

Negativity and suicide

I now want to say something about the relation of the extreme negativity in narcissism to suicide. In *Anna Karenina*, Anna commits suicide, Vronsky attempts suicide, and Levin struggles with suicidal impulses. In the two myths that I have referred to, both Narcissus and Cassius commit suicide. The step towards help always brings with it knowledge, which is why it is avoided. Any step towards the *lifegiver* brings knowledge. If the infantile spontaneous emotional self is touched, if some contact is made, then this allows a glimpse of the terrible tyrant that has smothered that self and not allowed it to come into contact with anything life-enhancing, and this often generates despair.

The grandiose side of the self always steps in at such a moment and exaggerates the truth, saying something like, "You see? Everything you've done is absolutely hopeless." It condemns from within, precisely at the moment when the person makes the step. It is very easy at that moment for someone to become extraordinarily negative and to commit suicide.

It is terribly important, when the analyst sees such a situation arising, to be aware of how vicious this negativity can

be. It is of the utmost importance to see the mentality and to try to hold it up to the patient in such a way that they can see it too. As I said earlier, it is a mistake to try to make the patient feel more hopeful. This will be of no help to them. The thing to do is to hold up the negativistic, self-pitying, vengeful mentality clearly to view, avoiding any flavour of condemnation. If the patient can see the mentality in all its deathly colours, it may mobilize a spirit of courage in the personality and enable him to stand up against it.

The relation between trauma and the narcissistic option

Narcissism is nearly always the product of a trauma. The whole narcissistic way of functioning—the grandiosity and the disowning of parts of the self—is a defensive procedure. It can be difficult to grasp this in the middle of an encounter with someone who is exceedingly narcissistic, given the way such a person is always arousing other people—making them want to escape, making them anxious or angry, whatever it happens to be.

One of the difficulties, when trying to treat someone who is narcissistic, is that you cannot truly find out what the trauma is until you get through some of this defensive barrage. In someone's case history you might see that they have had some terrible disaster in their childhood, but no amount of talking will be of therapeutic value unless that talking makes contact with the emotional reality of those events. Quite frequently you can hear someone speak about some trauma they have undergone, they may even cry about it, but they speak from a distance. This is understandable. When there has been severe trauma, the last thing a person wants to do is to return emotionally to where it happened.

The nature of trauma

"Trauma" is a medicopsychological word meaning "shock". When people are shocked, they are dazed, they do not know what has hit them. There is a sudden change of circumstances, and they may feel in a state of panic. They cannot adjust to the situation; their psychological essence has been profoundly shaken. The structure of their inner and outer relations has been radically altered. It is not, necessarily, a case of something new having occurred, but that the psychological entity was unprepared for the event. A man of 50 might be prepared for the death of his mother; a one-year-old child is not. There is a preparation through life for particular losses, separations, deaths, and so on. The essence of trauma is that a stability based on steady expectation has been shattered.

As Winnicott stressed, in psychological growth there is a process of steady detachment—a child detaching itself by degrees from close bonding with the mother, with the help of the father, and making new attachments, going to school, and so on. There is a tempo of detachment that is predetermined by inner triggers and is helped by emotional nurturing. Shock occurs when this process is suddenly disrupted.

Inserting oneself into the traumatizing agent

The thesis that I am presenting here is that one of the ways of managing trauma, a sudden onrush of stimulation, is the narcissistic option. To distance himself from what is happening, the person enters the narcissistic way of being. In a grandiose state, he or she is able to push away those things that are painful, is able to dispel parts of himself into others, and lives anaesthetized against whatever the painful thing may be.

When there has been a trauma, a person propels himself (which he is able to do when he takes on a grandiose identity) into the pattern of the traumatizing agent. If someone has been treated cruelly by a parent, one of the ways of living with the trauma is to push away the infant self that has been thus

treated and to behave cruelly to others. People who have been brought up by tyrannical authoritarian parents will often parent their own children in the same way. Sometimes they will do the opposite and overindulge their child, but it is the same basic problem—the traumatized person inserting him or herself into the traumatizing agent.

I came across a case once of a man who, in his initial assessment, told of his father who was extremely sadistic and made him stand in the garage at home whenever he had done anything naughty—quite minor things—and he had to hold his hands out in front of him for three hours. If one hand dropped slightly, his father would whip him. This man had two children, a boy and a girl, and the therapist noticed that he rarely mentioned the boy, while referring from time to time to the girl and to his wife. What emerged was that this man was beginning to enact cruel rituals with his son, just as his father had done with him. The man had solved the problem of his own trauma by psychologically being in it, as it were. That was what had been producing the anxiety that propelled him towards therapy. It could have been possible for that man to attend therapy and for the trauma to go undetected, but the therapist noticed that he never mentioned his son. He did not mention the boy because he felt so guilty.

It takes a good deal of therapeutic tact and skill to elucidate that sort of thing in such a way that it is possible for it to be owned. As I have stressed earlier, once it begins to be owned, then something can be done about it. Sometimes the anxiety is so great that it is pushed out to such an extent that the person would never approach a therapist or an analyst. Most narcissistic people probably never go near analysts or therapists but just persecute the community in which they live.

Here is another example of a person propelling herself into the character rhythm of the traumatizing agent. I was once treating a woman in her late forties who had a brother with a severe physical handicap, with the result that it seemed to her that all her mother's attention went to the brother. This was her complaint. Something I noticed about her fairly early in the treatment was that a great deal of the focus of her attention was on me. If I had a cold, she would fuss over me. I have a bad

knee, which occasionally makes me limp, and if she ever noticed that I was limping, she would be enormously concerned: "Was I all right? I was not to worry, she'd be quite happy not to come for her next appointment. . . ."

Her behaviour towards me was similar to the behaviour of her mother towards her brother. Why had she inserted herself into her mother's identity? One's own feelings can give one an indication of what is going on. Contrary to what one might expect, I did not feel that she was concerned about me. I felt annoyed by her constant over-protection. She was coming to see me with the rightful expectation that I would be able to offer her treatment, but all that fussing over me prevented her from asking for my help.

I had made interpretations on a number of occasions about the way she was repeating with me the drama that had occurred between her mother and her brother, but all that had little effect. One day I said, "You know you don't come here in order to look after my physical well-being, so I wonder why you do it". This was a shock to her. She took it in and then told her brother that she was receiving treatment because she had various problems. Her brother was greatly relieved because he had felt that he was the only problem person in the family, and that he had been a burden. He felt that she was acknowledging that this was not the case, and he begged her to speak to her mother about it, which after some reluctance she did. Her mother then said she had always been frustrated that her daughter had never allowed her to mother her, which was exactly my problem—she did not allow me to treat her. She was hurt that the mother gave her brother all her attention, and so she turned off and said, "OK, then, I'm not going to have any". In that way she was repudiating her mother, making her brother suffer more, and making herself suffer. The grandiosity lies in, "I don't need mother. All these other patients come to see this chap and they need it, but I don't need it. I'll look after him."

In taking up the narcissistic option, people propel themselves into the persecuting pattern rather than challenging it. Fairbairn refers to bad inner objects, and I think what he means by this is that people propel themselves into bad identities without being aware of what they are doing. For instance,

it was quite a severe shock to this woman when she realized that what looked like philanthropic behaviour was in fact rather mean, refusing behaviour to her mother, to her brother, to herself, and, in the treatment, to me. She much regretted that she had refused marriage and harmed herself thereby.

The narcissistic envelope

When people have been through a terrible trauma and they deal with it by inserting themselves into the agent, there is a way in which they live in a cocoon—they are very dissociated. I sometimes refer to this cocoon as a narcissistic envelope. My experience is that often, when a patient comes for treatment, it is as if they have been in such an envelope and are just beginning to break out of it. To go back to the case of the man whose father treated him sadistically, he had been in his narcissistic envelope for a long time and nothing in particular had been enacted from it, but when his son reached the age at which he himself had been treated so cruelly, the behaviour began to come out in relation to the son. Obviously it reached such a level of intolerability that he sought treatment.

Often a kind of war develops between analyst and patient, with the analyst trying to haul the patient out of the cocoon and the patient pulling for all his worth in the other direction, in an effort to stay where he is. Another thing that happens in these situations is that the patient makes the analyst or the therapist the repository for his *elan vital*, his own positive life thrust, handing the therapist the role of pulling him out of that envelope, as it were. There is some knowledge in such cases, although probably not within awareness, that they are in the grip of something that is stifling their life.

A short quote from *Anna Karenina* illustrates this. It is at the point when Anna appears to be dying, and Karenin is with her. He is about to leave, and she says to him,

"Wait a moment, you don't know . . . Stay a little, stay! . . ."
She stopped, as if trying to collect her thoughts. "Yes", she began; "Yes, yes, yes. This is what I wanted to say. Don't be

surprised at me. I'm still the same but there is another woman in me, I'm afraid of her: it was she who fell in love with that man, and I tried to hate you, and I could not forget the self that had once been. I'm not that woman. Now I'm my real self, all myself. I'm dying now, I know I am; you ask him. I feel it already. My hands and feet are as heavy as lead, and my fingers—look at them: see how huge they are! But it will all soon be over . . . I only want one thing—for you to forgive me, forgive me completely!" [p. 438]

It is the strength of the realization that there is another person within that will often make a person hand over the healthy side to the therapist and say, "For heaven's sake, look after it. This other person in me is so treacherous and strangling!"

Sometimes someone who has managed to come out of the cocoon and is reflecting on how things were will refer to friends, relatives, or whoever, who made emotional statements that somehow broke through the cocoon a little and made contact with the emotional life that was going on inside. Usually, however, such a contact is insufficient to haul the person out. When someone comes for therapy, there is the hope that this hauling out will be possible. Without doubt, there are people who manage to come out of a narcissistic state without therapy through certain life experiences and realizations, but such occurrences are uncommon.

When people propel themselves into the pattern of the traumatizing agent, they sometimes also propel themselves into the time structure of the trauma. Someone I knew some years ago went into analysis, and he left it rather precipitately when he had been going for four years and nine months. Friends of his later worked out that he had been exactly four years and nine months old when his mother died. Fairly soon after leaving analysis, he committed suicide. I think that occasionally there are situations where at a particular moment there is a terrible struggle, when the question of whether they are going to stay with the traumatizing agent or manage to pull themselves out of it hangs in the balance. I think that this man had reached such a moment, and he had failed to pull himself out.

Cumulative trauma

Sometimes it is not a particular traumatic event that precipitates a self into a particular character rhythm but what has been referred to in the psychoanalytic literature as cumulative trauma. People can be traumatized by the emotional character of their parents. For instance, a person who had had an emotionally cold mother or father since babyhood might insert himself or herself into this character. Suppressing the infant looking for love and comfort, they take up the identity of a cold, heartless, withdrawn figure. The most traumatizing experience of all is the absence of emotional giving from a mother or father. It is important, however, not to blame the parent. They may themselves have had severe difficulties, such as illness or bereavement, in their own childhood.

The pull towards narcissism

The relationship between the narcissistic option and the trauma is one of defensive inclusion. Is it correct to call this an option? Would another pathway have been open to the infant? It is difficult to answer that question, but opportunities to reverse it are certainly offered. It is important to realize that the pull towards narcissism is intensified by the traumatic experience, so that the more intense the traumatic experience, the greater the pull towards the narcissistic option. It also depends on the stage of development the infant has reached. The younger the age at which the trauma occurs, the greater is the pull towards narcissism. If one draws an equation in which T equals trauma, DS equals the development stage, and PN is the pull towards narcissism, the intensity of PN is a product of T and DS . Fairbairn (1976) thought that there is a certain threshold of emotional tolerance in all of us from infancy on, and that when stress goes beyond that threshold, the ego shatters. He also believed that a person might take the narcissistic solution when he has been exposed to excessive stress.

Trauma can pull someone out of narcissism

Certainly in adult life, and probably in late childhood and adolescence as well, a trauma can have the opposite effect and start to pull someone out of narcissism. If you take the case of the man with the sadistic father who found that he was beginning to act sadistically towards his son, that trauma put in train his desire for treatment.

Psychoanalysis itself is a traumatic situation that patients put themselves into, and sometimes it can result in significant events taking place. For instance, people entering psychoanalysis quite commonly start a sexual affair, which partly serves to put up a barrier against the intensity of stimulation that psychoanalysis causes. Psychoanalysis is an example of a traumatic situation that, if conducted satisfactorily, is geared to pull someone out of a narcissistic state.

A protection against pain

When narcissism is opted for, it is to protect the individual against appalling pain. It is extremely important to keep this in mind. It is quite difficult to be in the presence of someone with severe mental pain, and because of this sometimes there are therapeutic or analytic situations in which both the patient and the analyst protect themselves against the pain. Mental pain, however, is inevitable if the person is to get better.

The worse the trauma, the more intense and heavily entrenched the narcissistic currents will be, which means that all the more support will be needed for the healthy side of the personality to enable the person to come out of it. What is being asked of the person is to give up a particular way of defending himself or herself. The therapist's task is to support the struggling life-enhancing side against the side that desperately wants to keep within that narcissistic refuge and remain anaesthetized.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The reversal of narcissism

Is it possible to reverse the narcissistic situation? The theory I am positing is that narcissism is chosen, in traumatic circumstances, at a deep level within the personality. As it is a choice, it is possible for that choice to be reversed. I take the view, however, that there can be traumata so severe that the human spirit collapses. Remember the story of Anne Frank. She endured appalling suffering but finally, in the concentration camp, her sister's death broke her spirit, and she then died too. My view is in line with Bowlby's researches where he posits three stages in the infant's relation to loss. My thesis is that when the spirit breaks, the person may opt for the narcissistic solution. This is in line with Frances Tustin, who says that the autistic shell covers a black hole of despair, and I believe that what she describes as infantile autism is closely allied to infantile narcissism.

My thesis is that individuals are given the chance, perhaps several chances, to alter that radical narcissistic option. This is contrary to a determinist view, which holds that narcissism comes about because of certain circumstances—trauma. It is then difficult to see how it can be reversed. I think that there is

an intermediate step, which is an affective response to the trauma. This has to be seen in the light of what I said earlier about the *lifegiver*. The *lifegiver* is a mental object within, which only comes into existence at the moment of being chosen. It is outside, but yet, when opted for, it is inside. This moment of choosing is always risky. There is daring involved. A safe haven has to be abandoned without knowing that what has been chosen is going to be better. In the myth, at the last moment Cassius does not dare cross the river. In *Anna Karenina*, in those last terrible hundred pages before Anna's death, she is totally preoccupied with whether Vronsky loves her.

With this sort of preoccupation—"Does this person love me?"—there is always a sour, poisonous mentality within. The person is continually having to escape from this mentality into the preoccupation. In all those pages, as I mentioned before, there seems to be no movement "towards" in Anna. What does she do to command respect? Kitty, Levin, and Dolly all do things that are worthwhile. Even Oblonsky gets Levin and Kitty together again, and when his debts are mounting, he does finally get himself a job on a committee. But it is very difficult to see what Anna does. One of the tragedies of Anna is that her suicide came as she was making a move. She had begun to hate Vronsky, which was the beginning of an action towards—a recognition of an object and an activity of the psyche in relation to.

A story of the reversal of narcissism

I think the drama of what occurs between Kitty and Levin is the story of the reversal of narcissism. In all great literature the external action symbolizes what is occurring within. Levin is wounded when Kitty refuses him with that pithy statement, "I fear that cannot be". But herein lies the difference between the Anna-Karenin couple and Kitty and Levin. In both cases Vronsky intervenes: what does he symbolize? Both Anna's and Kitty's deepest desire is overthrown through a sudden passionate attachment to Vronsky. What did Vronsky have that neither Levin nor Karenin had? What was the special quality? How did

he manage to exercise so powerful an attraction? An obvious answer is that he was sexually enormously attractive. However, we cannot put a full stop there. Why was he able to evoke such over-riding sexual passion? I think he represents an inner assassin of whom the individual is terrified, precipitating a flight into sexual passion. Vronsky does not understand that there can be any inspiration within the soul. He is the erotic representation of the inner killer into whose arms Anna flees, but whom, despite profound attraction, Kitty is able to avoid. When Anna faces death, she feels guilt and regret, but then the great portcullis drops again. This is, I believe, because she cannot face the horror of the assassin she has fashioned within her. With Kitty and with Levin, this fashioning of the assassin never occurs. There is an aperture, however small, between the two that never closes. Here is the touching reunion between Levin and Kitty, which took place at the Oblonskys'.

Levin agreed with Dolly that a girl who did not marry could always find some feminine occupation in the family. He supported the view by saying that no family can get along without women to help them, that every family, poor or rich, had to have nurses, either paid or belonging to the family.

"No," said Kitty, blushing, but looking at him all the more boldly with her truthful eyes, "a girl may be so placed that it is humiliating for her to live in the family, while she herself. . . ."

He understood her allusion.

"Oh yes", he said. "Yes, yes, yes—you're right; you're right!"

And he saw all that Pestsov had been driving at at dinner about the freedom of women, simply because he got a glimpse of the terror in Kitty's heart of the humiliation of remaining an old maid; and, loving her, he felt that terror and humiliation, and at once gave up his contention.

A silence followed. She continued scribbling on the table with the chalk. Her eyes shone with a soft light. Surrendering to her mood he felt a continually growing tension of happiness throughout his whole being.

"Oh, I've scribbled all over the table!" she exclaimed, and, putting down the chalk, made a movement to get up.

"What! Shall I be left alone—without her?" he thought, with terror, and took the piece of chalk. "Don't go," he said, sitting down at the table. "I've wanted to ask you a question for a long time." He looked straight into her caressing, though frightened eyes.

"What is it?"

"Here," he said, and wrote down the initial letters, w, y, t, m, l, c, n, b—d, y, m, n, o, t. These letters stood for, "When you told me *it could not be*—did you mean never, or then?" There seemed no likelihood that she would be able to decipher this complicated sequence; but he looked at her as though his life depended on her understanding the words.

She gazed up at him seriously, then leaned her puckered forehead on her hand and began to read. Once or twice she stole a look at him, as though asking, "Is that what I think?"

"I know what it is," she said, flushing a little.

"What is this word?" he asked, pointing to the *n* which stood for *never*.

"That means *never*," she said, "but it's not true!"

He quickly rubbed out what he had written, handed her the chalk and stood up. She wrote: *T, l, c, n, a, d*.

Dolly felt consoled for the grief caused by her conversation with Karenin when she caught sight of the two together: Kitty with the chalk in her hand, gazing up at Levin with a shy, happy smile, and his fine figure bending over the table, his radiant eyes directed now on the table, now on her. He was suddenly radiant: he had understood. The letters meant: "Then I could not answer differently."

He glanced at her questioningly, timidly.

"Only then?"

"Yes," her smile answered.

"And *n* . . . —now?" he asked.

"Well, read this. I'll tell you what I should like, what I should like so much!" She wrote the initial letters: *t, y, c, f, a, f, w, h*, meaning, "If you could forget and forgive what happened."

He seized the chalk, breaking it with his nervous, trembling fingers, and wrote the first letters of the following sentence: "I have nothing to forget and forgive; I have never ceased to love you."

She looked at him with a smile that did not waver.

"I understand," she said in a whisper.

He sat down and wrote a long sentence. She understood it all and, without asking if she was right, took the chalk and at once wrote the answer.

For a long time he could not make out what it was, and kept looking up into her eyes. He was dazed with happiness. He could not fill in the words she meant at all; but in her lovely eyes, suffused with happiness, he saw all that he needed to know. And he wrote down three letters. But before he had finished writing she read them over his arm, and herself finished and wrote the answer, "Yes". [pp. 422-423]

The *lifegiver* as a component within comes about through a leap in the dark. This extract gives a feeling of the terrible risk. I do not think anyone could put it better than Tolstoy does here. The fear in the human heart is enormous when taking one of these major emotional steps. I remember once a man whom I was seeing for psychotherapy saying, "This step that I'm daring to take is just as great as climbing Mount Everest", and I agreed with him. But it is that step outwards that is the core of the healthy self.

The impingement on the self of the other

The patient who taught me most about psychoanalysis and the dynamics of emotional communication began, at a crucial point in the treatment, to hate me. It was a bitter, unrelenting hatred, which went on for three and a half years, and it quite unnerved me. One of the constants was that as a man there were certain things that I could not possibly understand. I thought she might well be right, and at one point I asked a female colleague to see her a couple of times to assess the situation. My colleague concluded that it was better for the patient to continue with me. Then she broke down, and a most powerful love broke through, followed by enormous anxiety about having hurt me.

In her I think I was witnessing a reversal of narcissism, but it began with the hatred. Hatred is still a closing off and terror

of allowing receptivity to the *lifegiver*. It is a hatred of the presence of the other, but it is acknowledgement of the other as other, and it is action. However, when the reversal is finally allowed to take place, then hate breaks up and love replaces it.

What is the rationale for this hatred? It is simply that there is an other. In the narcissistic illusion there is no other; there is only me. I have had two patients who have told me that in childhood they had a phantasy that they were the only person who existed. In the narcissistic situation there is a desperate clinging onto this delusion, only it is generally hidden because the person projects himself into some figure who is believed to be everything. Anna did this with Vronsky.

One of the ways in which I sustain the delusion that there is no other is to control this other. I make it such that it does not become an other. It is the impingement on the self of the other that is hated.

In patients who are shut off from the other, the other represents their own smothered selves. In an analytic situation if you have a countertransference experience in which you feel totally shut out and not treated as a human being, then you know that this is symbolizing the patient's inner personality. Hatred is a first step, because it is a beginning of the acknowledgement of the other, and of course it also means that there is hatred of their own selves—of the selves that are attempting to come to birth. I am sure that Tolstoy means to symbolize this in the slow birth and development of the love between Kitty and Levin.

The strength of resistance

Now we need to try to understand why this movement outwards, this movement towards, which can reverse narcissism, is so fiercely resisted. Of one thing I am sure, and that is that it is resisted with a desperation that is far stronger—violent, even—than any other obstacle you might come up against in an analytic treatment. A whole life's orientation is at stake, and

the collapse of such an edifice seems like the end of the world. When the Roman Empire collapsed in AD 410, civilized people within the empire thought that it was the end of the world. Saint Augustine of Hippo wrote a long book called *The City of God* in an attempt to demonstrate that there would still be a world after the empire's collapse.

To the patient, all that seems certain and sure, all that has been built up over a lifetime—perhaps a long lifetime—is experienced as collapsing. One might posit that there was a flicker of this awareness of collapse in Anna when she impulsively drove to see Dolly shortly before she killed herself, but often the work of reconstruction seems so enormous that the narcissistic voice says: "Don't bother." When hope gleams, the narcissistic currents inside do all in their power to pull down this new-found figure.

There is the shame-faced feeling of having to begin all over again, having to start at the bottom of the ladder. A feature of the narcissistic state is that one is catapulted into adulthood and the hated child status is violently repudiated. Narcissism protects me from feeling a child, even from being a child, but no part of my history is ever cancelled out. It is all within me; my foetal stage, my infancy, my childhood, my adolescence, my early adulthood, my middle adulthood, and so on. Narcissism is the quick fix. I believe I am an adult; I believe I am a mature married man. In the narcissistic situation all that is unpleasant to my self-image I can ditch. I can look down my nose with contempt at the child-like ways of my fellows, and I can get rid of my infantile self by pushing it somewhere—into my body, into another part of my mind, or into others—and in this process I construct a world view to be consistent with what I have done. I will develop a philosophy that will fit the shape of what I have done. In fact, my world view always fits what I do. In the reversal of narcissism all this is threatened. Underneath there is a paranoia. Narcissism is a cover. I have not reached the depressive position, but I do not know it.

Great as these factors are in persuading us not to give up the narcissistic direction, they are not the kernel of the matter; they are the secondary consequences of a change of direction, not the very threat itself.

The step to fashion one's own reality

In the narcissistic state the activity of my intentional centre is smothered. I rob others of their ideas, I enter the emotional directionality of others and use a variety of devices, but at root it is they who do the doing. I stay passive. I do not take that step into the unknown. Cassius does not dare to cross the river. I have known intelligent people, people at the top of the academic tree, who have a detailed knowledge of their subjects but who, ultimately, are wearing the cloaks of others. The step to fashion something that is mine and therefore unique is powerfully resisted. This is a step through which the individual comes into possession of the *lifegiver*. As soon as the person takes that step, it brings with it knowledge that is quite different from a knowledge that has been received passively.

I once met a man who had trekked with a dozen camels from central Kenya to Lake Rudolph and had written a book about it. Even though I have read the book, I will never know what such a journey is like in the way the author knows. He knows in an indelible way, because he has done it. I have not ridden a camel, and I have never visited that part of Africa. If I had trekked with camels from Bathurst to Kalgoorlie, then I might have some idea of it, but that would be because I would have had some equivalent experiences.

This doing it myself, this fashioning a new reality that brings new knowledge, is, I think, the key to the resistance. The new knowledge brings uncomfortable images in its wake. A friend once told me that he had thought that his father was useless, and it was part of his mental furniture that his father had made his mother's life a misery. Then, one day, after his father had died, he visited the family solicitor, who said to him, "You know, your father was a very caring man. You're quite wrong in your perception of him." This came as a rude shock to my friend. Obviously the solicitor had spoken at just the right moment, but my friend's whole way of seeing things started to crumble. Perhaps you might say that he was pulled from his narcissistic envelope. He had to reassess his mother's statements about his father, ask himself why he had drunk in his mother's words so willingly, and then he began to feel horrified

at the way he had treated his father. Basically, he had not been in contact with the other—with his father as he really was.

Something else needs to be thought about: *not to change is vicious*. Conscience taps at our door. It is extremely vicious for therapists and analysts not to assist a patient to change. The core of narcissism is to “go along with” the situation, and our own narcissism will tempt us to do this. It is frightening to go against, to be close to madness, to violence, and to death.

Changing the emotional facts of our lives

To return to the main point, the narcissistic situation goes into reverse the moment that we start to do, to create. Those analysts influenced by Melanie Klein use the concept of the death instinct. I think this conceptual structure is wrong, but I do think that there is a powerful force within the personality *against* the establishment of a personal creation, and that this is well verified from clinical practice.

The marvel is that it is possible to change the emotional facts of our lives. Our lives are not set in concrete, but the narcissistic voice will always tell us that we are. Our minds can change, and with a changed mind our personal world changes. It can change radically. A changed mentality alters the emotional events of our lives—past, present, and future. It is through our particular mentality that we grasp our past. A mind that has essentially lain inert but has incorporated the views of admired figures, that has inserted itself into the emotional attitudes of admired figures or systems of thought, is a very different mind to one that fashions out of its own inner resources.

Bernard Berenson, the American-Lithuanian art critic, said that all painters from the decline of antique painting in the Graeco-Roman world until the Renaissance, had been illustrators, copyists. One after another, down the ages, painters had been in the thrall of a slavish obedience, until Giotto, who, with the same religious themes in front of him as had stood before his forebears for a thousand years, fashioned a new reality out

of his own soul. So, said Berenson, the Rubicon was crossed from illustration to art. I use this moment in the story of art as a symbol of what I am trying to convey.

An unconscious decision

I now want to utter a few words of caution. It would be easy to take what I have been saying and romanticize it. That crucial moment of personal fashioning is something that happens in the depths, at a level of which we are unaware, but we see the product of it. As soon as you romanticize it, you lose its reality.

To illustrate what I mean, I once knew a man who had recovered from drug addiction, from alcoholism, and from being a recidivist prisoner. He had been absolutely in the depths. As we know, most people in such a situation fail to recover, but there are a few who do. At that time, I was interested in those few. This man was married, with two children; he lived in a London suburb and worked as a journalist. I asked him what the events were that had led to this change. There were two significant events, one of which I want to speak about. At the time he was living as an in-patient in a large old-fashioned mental hospital that straddled huge grounds in north London. He was in a ward for alcoholics, and in this ward it was the rule that if anyone went out and drank, they would not be readmitted. So he went out and drank. He returned with a bottle of wine and sat on a bench in the hospital grounds. His wife had thrown him out, so he could not go home. The rules forbade him to return to the ward, and it was pouring with rain. He said to himself: "There are two things I can do; either I can go and throw this bottle through the windows of the ward, or I can kill myself." Then the sky cleared for a moment, and this thought arose unexpectedly from within him: "Or I could decide to get better." He felt that that moment marked the beginning of his return to psychic health.

This incident highlights a number of features that a psychotherapist needs to bear in mind, but for the moment I want to focus on just one factor. The thought that came to him—"Or I could decide to get better"—was already the product of some-

thing, although it felt as if it had come from out of the blue. There was a prehistory, one element of which was a powerful desire to get better. This implied that there was a recognition that all was not well. As spectators, we might say that that was obvious, but what is obvious to others is often not obvious to me.

That thought, "I could decide to get better", was the result of a decision, but the decision itself happened out of consciousness. The decision-making is clouded by the unconscious, which is demanded by the narcissistic currents in the personality. One of the problems when narcissism is rife in the personality is that the good is smothered as well as the bad. That aside, it seems always to be the case that the actual process of decision is not known, only its cognitive outcome.

Prior to that, in order to avoid drinking, he used to say to himself, "I will not drink, I will not drink", but obviously that was ineffective. Those were not decisions at all. Whatever occurred to him while he was sitting on the bench in the rain was the product of a decision—a real decision. This was the point at which the opting for the *lifegiver* occurred.

Feelings can be an incorrect register

There is another point that is equally important. When this friend said to himself, "I could decide to get better", it was not something he merely felt. It was a thought—he knew there was another option. The knowledge arose from an action, although the action was out of consciousness. I can say, after reading the book by my acquaintance who took the camels to Lake Rudolph, "I feel as if I have made the journey myself", but I have not made it, so my knowledge of it lacks a quality that he possesses. My recovered friend's new journey was based on knowledge, on something he had done, on an inner psychic action—a different action, but every bit as real as the journey taken by the man with the camels, just like the man who said he thought the emotional step he was about to take was equal to climbing Mount Everest. There is a crucial difference between psychic action that leads to knowledge and an action

where I put myself into the patterned imago of another. In the latter case I can feel that I have been to Lake Rudolph, but I have not. I can feel that I have made a leap, but I have not. Feelings can be an incorrect register.

Despairing of illusory images and solutions

It is necessary now to note some of the logical consequences of the reversal of narcissism. What leads to psychic change is inner psychic action. Interpretation does not bring about change. Interpretation may either encourage the individual towards the moment of psychic action, or it may be the product of psychic action that has already occurred. It is extremely important to realize this. The inner psychic action is made by the person alone, in their own freedom.

What sorts of conditions favour inner psychic action? In the example of the recovered alcoholic, it was crucial that he had reached rock-bottom. He had been thrown out of his home and out of the hospital ward, and he was sitting on a bench in the pouring rain. In that situation of near despair the *lifegiver*, which had been repudiated but never entirely killed off, became unsmothered. If a would-be philanthropist had come up and tried to soothe him as he was sitting on the bench, the moment would have been wrecked.

A friend told me once that the turning point in analysis for him came when he said to his analyst one day that things had been so bad that they could only improve. The analyst replied, "Or they could get worse". The point about that sort of despair is that it is a despair of illusory images and solutions that are generated by the narcissistic situation.

I was treating a girl once whose life had been crippled by a severe obsessional neurosis; it was an absolute misery of restrictions, inner and outer. One day she had a vision of her past, strewn with sick episodes, and I said to her, "Perhaps this is your life". I felt terrible about saying it, for she was only young, but I think it was a turning point for her. I sensed that it would have been a mistake not to say it, a mistake to protect her from that despair—despair of a narcissistic solution.

My experience tells me that it is necessary for the analyst to be unrelenting in stripping away the false consolations with which a narcissistic person is surrounded, while holding them firmly, as it were, with care and concern. If there is a moment of despair about all these sensual erotizations, then the person is forced into relation with an inner mental object. In despair, all these false images and solutions are thrust aside. It is essential to reach the real good, the spontaneous action within a person, and to give that our full support. I am struck by how much we therapists are taken in by the fake good. The good is fake when it is at the level of words rather than of emotional action. It is quite frequently difficult to detect the difference.

Also, in order that the patient may reach despair, the therapist must not offer any transitory comforts. Extra sessions, addictive telephone calls, giving advice, lending books, and a myriad other little "comforts" are to be avoided. It is also important to work out what is to the point. Often when I have said something to a patient, I ask myself afterwards, "Did that really advance things at all?"

Some comments on technique

I have deliberately not said much about therapeutic technique. I generally prefer to lay out my ideas and leave it to the therapists themselves to apply them in whatever ways they feel are appropriate. However, I want to say something about a type of mirroring response that occurs a good deal. For instance, a patient comes in and says, "I came here today, and I felt down, and I didn't really want to come", and the therapist answers, "I understand that you're feeling depressed". This does not do anything. Instead of mirroring, the therapist has a job to do. Instead of gabbling, the therapist should be thinking about why the patient is depressed. In my second case when I was training to be an analyst, I had the good fortune to mirror in this way, and the patient said to me, "But I just said that". Good for him; but you seldom get someone so candid.

This type of mirroring response occurs to such an extent that I think there must be a special college that teaches it.

When a person who comes in and says, "I didn't want to come today", the therapist may not know why they did not want to come, but they can think instead of gabbling. In psychotherapy the healing process is in one mind to another, and the words are the vehicles that carry the mental attitude back and forth. Think of that when you speak. Ask yourself, "What sort of vehicle was that?"

There is another common error that we need to avoid. The patient says to the therapist, "I'm afraid of saying this because I think you will be disapproving". In my experience it is very common for the therapist to respond, "I wonder what leads you to think I'll be disapproving". This is tantamount to saying, "Don't worry, I won't be disapproving". The patient has a problem expressing his opinion when someone is disapproving, and that is crippling. If the therapist just says, "Don't worry, I won't be disapproving", nothing has been done to solve the patient's problem. I think a more useful response would be, "Why does my disapproval prevent you from speaking?" You may say, "I'm not disapproving", and you may be aware that it is a projection, but for that patient the disapproval barrier is the Rubicon that they must cross. If the therapist says, "I wonder why you think I'll be disapproving", and the patient then thinks, "What a nice person; now I'll say those unpleasant things", it creates a huddle between patient and therapist and does nothing to solve the patient's problem in relation to other disapproving people.

In both these cases, particularly the second, the therapist is playing into the narcissistic currents rather than providing an environment that assists the person to take the creative step and to dare.

To end with a point I made earlier—you can create conditions that make the creative step more possible, but you cannot actually make that step for the other person. This psychic action has to occur from within. The recovered alcoholic displayed, I believe, a certain heroism. We cannot blame a person for not being a hero, but we can be encouraged when someone does take the high path.

CHAPTER NINE

The relation of this theory to other psychoanalytic theories

I now intend to compare the theory I have been proposing with various other psychoanalytic theories of narcissism, in particular those that have arisen out of the British Object Relations School—the theories of Fairbairn, Melanie Klein, Winnicott, Frances Tustin, and Heinz Kohut—not so much because they specifically addressed narcissism, although they did do so, but because the approaches people take to narcissism are usually related to one of these theories.

Fairbairn's theory of narcissism

Fairbairn seldom used the term “narcissism” because he focused his clinical attention upon what he referred to as schizoid states, by which he meant states in which the ego was withdrawn into itself and not in contact with the external object. The foundation stone of all his theorizing was that lib-ido was object-seeking. Freud said that libido is energy, a drive, seeking discharge through one of the erotogenic zones.

Fairbairn, however, said that the erotogenic zone was just a gateway through which libido travels in order to reach the object. So libido acquired a different meaning in his hands, and I think libido was the wrong term for what he was describing.

Looked at subjectively, Fairbairn said that everyone is seeking emotional contact with another, and that this is the deepest yearning of the human heart. Finding emotional contact with another is what endows life with meaning. This is different from Freud's model, because what for Freud was sexual drive becomes emotional desire for Fairbairn. Freud made the distinction between the aim and the object of the drive, and Fairbairn maintained this, though for him the object is the drive's aim, and the erotogenic zone becomes the *means* of its achievement. With Freud it is the reverse: the object is just the way of bringing about the discharge of tension. In Freud's theory there is no way of distinguishing between masturbation, homosexual contact, sexual love between a man and a woman, sexual love of a casual sort or one of a deeper, more lasting kind. Of course, Freud did make distinctions, but not according to theory. His theory did not support his clinical findings. George Klein, in his book *Psychoanalytic Theory* (1979), makes a distinction between Freud's metapsychological theory and his clinical theory. I am referring here to Freud's metapsychological theory.

Fairbairn said that when the object is not available, the infant turns inward and provides its own object. The infant turns to this inner object, and this is always accompanied by bodily gratification. This inner direction typifies the position of what he calls the schizoid individual. This turning away from the outer object and making the self the object of gratification is what I have been describing as narcissism—the taking of the self as a sensuous object. However, there is nothing in Fairbairn's theory about the *lifegiver*—that which has not been chosen—because there is no notion of choice in libido.

Fairbairn is the only follower of Freud who discarded Freud's structural model: the ego, the superego, and the id. There is no id in his theory, just ego and object, and there are split-off parts of the ego. I might say that even if clinicians hold to the Freudian structural theory of the id, they do not actually operate on that basis, but on the basis that if an impasse comes up in someone, it comes from the split-off part of the

ego. Even Fairbairn's followers have not really taken on board the fact that he abandoned Freud's theory.

What Fairbairn refers to as the schizoid state of affairs comes about because the mother was withdrawn and emotionally unavailable to her baby. This explanation is deterministic: if *A* then *B*. If you have an emotionally withdrawn mother, then this is the result. There is no link.

The British Object Relations School, whether they are followers of Fairbairn or of Melanie Klein (as opposed to Anna Freud and the ego psychologists), has always maintained that there is an ego from birth, and an ego means an intentional relation to events. Anna Freud took issue with that view, as did Heinz Hartmann and a good many psychoanalysts in the United States, because they held tenaciously to Freud's drive theory and his theory of constancy—that the organism's basic motivating principle is to achieve a state of equilibrium.

Fairbairn radically recast the developmental theory of Freud and Abraham, and yet he left in place the concept of libido, which is essentially bound up with the theory of constancy, or what later became known as the homeostatic theory. Yet by libido he clearly meant something more approximating desire or possibly yearning. It is difficult to think of a term like "desire" without considering its opposite, "rejection". Fairbairn came very close to this when he talked of the "anti-libidinal ego".

The question of why Fairbairn kept the term "libido" is, I think, well worth asking. The only plausible answer seems to be that every great thinker who makes advances does so within a framework, some of the struts of which they are unable to relinquish. After Freud (and perhaps with the exception of Bion), I consider Fairbairn as the greatest psychoanalytic thinker in that he actually thought out the consequences of any step that he took. When Freud came across new clinical information, he would recast whole aspects of his theory; most clinicians, even people with considerable insight, do not do so. When they have a clinical insight, they simply paste it onto existing theory. Melanie Klein, for instance, just pasted the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions onto old theory. Winnicott did the same with the true and false self: he did not ask himself how the theory fitted with ego and id.

The term "libido" is part and parcel of Freud's physicalist metapsychology which Fairbairn relinquished, and it makes more sense of Fairbairn's theory to dispense with it altogether. I consider intentionality to be inseparable from an object relations theory. If we take out the mechanistic term "libido" and supplant it with "desire", then it has to be attached to a subject and an object. In fact, when Fairbairn considered Freud's psychosexual stages—the oral stage, the anal stage, the genital stage—he did indeed say that the oral stage should be called the breast stage, but he did not take the final step. If the statement is established thus, "I desire the breast", it becomes clear that it is an intentional statement, and it is possible for the opposite statement to appear: "I do not desire the breast."

Fairbairn said that the ego withdraws from the vacuum created by an emotionally unavailable mother and turns to an inner object, and there is a dual aspect to this object. The ego attaches to an inner bad object and simultaneously comforts itself by taking a bodily part as erotic object. This latter is the masturbatory object. It may be the thumb, which is sucked, the penis, which is rubbed, the clitoris, which is manipulated, the anal sphincter, which is stimulated. Any of these activities may be done solipsistically, or another may be seduced into doing it for the individual. In the latter case the external agent is scooped into being the masturbatory agent. These masturbatory activities are essential accompaniments of the attachment to the inner objects; the bad inner object demands it. The bad withdrawn mother is introjected, and this bad feeling within is so intolerable that compensatory activities to make the person feel better have to be sought out. The nature of this accompaniment now needs further investigation.

According to my theory, which goes further than Fairbairn's, the masturbatory activity need not be only direct stimulation of erotogenic zones; it can be erotogenically derived activity that has a symbolic link to an erotic activity. So the pleasure in evacuating faeces can be re-experienced symbolically by evacuating rubbish from the house. In a similar way, pleasure can be obtained by evacuating certain contents from the mind, and these contents can comprise a person or people. Outer people can be made to fit in with these masturbatory activities, pleasure being derived from treating the other person accord-

ing to these masturbatory actions. The pleasure in retaining faeces is symbolically re-enacted by withholding information from another, and the pleasure in pouring diarrhoea from the anus is symbolically re-enacted through pouring out words upon others. This latter is also linked to oral pleasures. The link occurs through the *amphimixis*, the unified pleasure centre. I have taken Fairbairn's theory further in suggesting that erotization of the self is the necessary way of summoning motivation for the individual who is largely governed by the pressures of a narcissistic option.

Fairbairn made another important point. He said that the emotionally unavailable mother is at the same time erotically exciting. A lack of emotional sustenance, as it were, makes the object ecstatic. He explains cases of incest on this basis, incest often occurring to fill a vacuum where there is a lack of emotional satisfaction.

Fairbairn's phenomenological description of the schizoid individual tallies closely with the model that I am proposing. The individual turns away from the outer world and takes his or her own self as object. The psychotherapist's job, in Fairbairn's view, is to crash through this inner fortress and bring the patient out of this turning inward and into relation with objects in the outer world.

Narcissism in Melanie Klein

Melanie Klein, like Fairbairn, held that the individual is object-related from birth, but, unlike Fairbairn, she did not recast Freud's and Abraham's libido theory. She maintained Freud's instinct theory, but her own clinical theory was based on a firm belief that there is an ego present at birth. (As I mentioned earlier, with the exception of Fairbairn, only rarely does the clinical theory of these psychoanalysts tie up fully with their metatheory.)

Melanie Klein posited that the infant's central problem arose from a fear of annihilation and that this fear came from the presence within the infant of what she called the "death instinct". Fairbairn said that the anxieties in an infant who has

had an emotionally unavailable mother arise from the infant having internalized this bad thing; Melanie Klein, on the other hand, held that the anxieties arise from the presence of a death instinct within the infant—a genetically constituted endowment.

The third building block of Melanie Klein's theory is that the primitive organism is governed by two activities: evacuation of inner contents outwards (what she refers to as "projection") and the taking in of outer things ("introjection"). The organism can be described by the push and pull of these two activities. An individual who is utterly preoccupied by this inner anxiety is in the narcissistic position; there is no energy available for relating properly to the self or to the outside.

In my description of the narcissistic position I say that its fundamental attitude is the rejection of the *lifegiver*. Fairbairn concentrated his attention upon the inner object towards which the ego turns, whereas Melanie Klein concentrated her attention upon the destructive activity that goes on within, resulting in the individual projecting feared impulses outwards and so making the outer object terrifying—in other words, a phobic impulse. Freud first spoke of a phobic impulse, in which one projects an inner object into the outer world, so that then one is fearful of the external object. In the most typical case the outer figure is felt to have it in for the person, and it becomes an object into which these massive fears are evacuated. Whereas Fairbairn said that the individual just turns away from these outer figures, Melanie Klein concentrated on what is done to them. She said that, far from being ignored or spurned, these outer figures are savagely invaded, attacked, robbed, and so on.

Both Fairbairn and Melanie Klein held that there is a psychic spurning of the outer figures as they are. Fairbairn held that this spurning comes about because the outer figures are bad (the emotionally withdrawn mother, for instance), whereas Melanie Klein stressed the way the infant *makes* them bad.

In the psychoanalytic literature on narcissism the viciousness that can come about in narcissistic people is well described. Melanie Klein's description of the ways in which the individual projects, with great power, hated aspects of the self

into others is not specifically linked in her theory to narcissism, but yet these activities are part and parcel of the person in this narcissistic position. What is not immediately clear is why such processes are always present when there is an elemental spurning of the presence of the other. To answer this, we need to consider several matters.

Fairbairn said that although the individual may want to spurn entirely the figures from the outer world, he or she is unable to do so. The infant is linked to outer figures for reasons of survival (this is a point that Bion stressed) and cannot entirely forswear the breast or the mother, but they can be hated. This is one way to look at it. Another way, following Fairbairn, is that the individual in the narcissistic position has turned inwards, to inner figures that are bad and unreal. Every effort is then made to make outer figures conform to these inner imagos, and they are manipulated into doing this. When an outer figure resists this powerful projective pressure, the individual bursts out with rage.

Yet this still does not entirely answer the question, or do justice to the facts. It is a fact that people do invade, rob, and plunder in the way Melanie Klein described. There is a good deal of evidence for this in the phantasy life of young children, and it is testified to in the atrocities that have occurred throughout human history. Nevertheless, it is a violence that is not explained entirely by what has been said so far. We need to return to the fundamental proposition to gain a more comprehensive grasp of it.

Melanie Klein was right, I am sure, to emphasize that outer objects are distorted through being projected into, and that inner objects are distorted through outer objects being imploded into them. I think she is also correct in drawing attention to the activities of the ego, such as splitting, projecting, and so on. In her view the ego is the source of activity, but she clung nevertheless to Freud's instinct theory and therefore to the idea of the death instinct; she considered the death instinct—the source of annihilation—as the basis of anxiety. Although she posited an active ego, its main activity was to defend itself against this destructive instinct within. Also, the ego is active in reparation but not in a new creative fashioning.

My criticism of Melanie Klein is the same as the criticism that Fairbairn levelled against her. It is that, given her view that there is an ego from birth and that there is object-relatedness from birth, it is illogical to maintain the constancy theory, the drive theory, and the concept of the id as usually understood. Melanie Klein's view is that the ego splits, coalesces, projects, and introjects due to guilt—deep guilt below the threshold of awareness. This would fit quite well with the theory I am proposing about a rejection and repudiation of the *lifegiver*. However, she then introduces the idea of the inner threat of annihilation from the presence of the death instinct, which I think is unnecessary. That we meet great destructiveness in ourselves, in our patients, and in society is too obvious a fact to require proof. The emotional violence that she posits is, to my mind, satisfactorily explained on the basis of guilt alone. I believe she maintained the concept of the death instinct in order to remain loyal to Freud's instinct theory, but it only muddles her otherwise clear formulations.

I would like to make a brief comment here. If I operate from two incompatible positions—identifying with the figure that has given me a particular theory, and doing something that contradicts it—it means I am split, and true personal conviction is impossible when such a split is operating. In any form of psychotherapy or psychoanalysis it is extremely important for the therapist or analyst to speak from the heart. Speaking from personal conviction is quite different from simply dishing up interpretations from teachers, or supervisors, or Freud, and the difference becomes evident in the treatment.

Narcissism in the thought of Winnicott

Winnicott arrived at a formulation of narcissism that is similar in some respect to Fairbairn's. For Winnicott, the true self retreats behind a false façade. This is similar to Fairbairn's conceptualization that the true self is not in contact with the figures of the outer world. The self has retreated within because of a mother who was unable to adapt to her baby properly, usually as a result of depression. Fairbairn said this retreat

took place because the baby encountered an emotional vacuum in the mother. Winnicott's theory, like Fairbairn's, allows no space for an intentional response from the baby.

There is another way of conceptualizing the origins of the false self. If we return to my thesis that there is a turning away from the other, both within and without, and that this is a guilty act, then the presented self has to be a pretence. The façade is cut out of the material of the mother's behaviour towards her baby, subjectively experienced. Let us say, for instance, that Mary is extremely polite and courteous towards all those whom she encounters in her professional and social life. This is, however, a façade. At a party, she may be extremely polite to a self-satisfied, middle-aged man, while inwardly she thinks he is a fool and wants to get away from him. She shows no sign of this, however. In fact, she is extremely contemptuous inwardly of people. So there is a dichotomy between her state of mind and her outer behaviour; she displays a false self. Inwardly she has spurned the presence-to-the-other, but outwardly she feigns extreme politeness. Where did she acquire this garment of politeness, which she wears with such care? Mary speaks regularly of her mother who is always so polite but by whom she felt betrayed, as a child of four, when she abandoned her to embrace a new career. Mary's reaction was to spurn the other and turn for comfort to a sensuous self, which she created in hallucinatory wish-fulfilment. But then she donned the mother's polite mask. Why?

She sought a model for the false front and selected that of the mother, but she could just as well have selected the father, or a combination of both. She had to choose a model, and the one closest to hand was chosen. When someone takes the narcissistic option, it is characteristic that they opt for the easiest solution; one that would involve a struggle is never selected.

Donning the mother's polite mask also gives pleasure. "I will turn away from her inwardly, but I will pretend to be just like her, so she cannot complain. I will frustrate her all the time, with consummate politeness. This gives me an inner sense of triumph." It is a sort of revenge on the mother. However, while it satisfies a desire to trick and deceive, the inner emotional child is severely frustrated.

Winnicott's explanation of the infant just retreating within because it has a depressed mother leaves out the step of intentionality. Again, the problem that lies behind the theory is Freud's determinist model—the notion that we are driven by instincts. Winnicott's theory does not account properly for there being a transformation of instinct. Consider how humans slowly evolved, finally emerging as ape-like creatures. If you go back 400,000 years, there is no sign whatever of any type of burial rite. People died, just as animals die. However, around 100,000 years ago people started to bury their dead. These discoveries have been written about a certain amount, but I am not sure that their significance, certainly regarding psychoanalytic theories, has been grasped. To me they show that humans are not just driven by instinct, but that the person is a source of action. It shows that there has been a transformation of instinct.

I do not want to go into the exact nature of the intentionality, but to stress that an intentional identification is what brings about the donning of the false self. Winnicott leaves out this intentional aspect in his description of its origins.

Narcissism in Frances Tustin

Frances Tustin has concentrated her attention on autistic states in children, and she has been remarkably successful in the psychotherapeutic treatment of autism. I will summarize her views.

Working as a child psychotherapist, she came across certain child patients who were severely autistic—that is, they were cut off from emotional contact with their family members and were therefore the source of great distress to these people. Tustin concluded that behind the walls of the internal fortresses built by these children lay psychotic depression. The depression—called by John, one of her early patients, “a black hole”—had been brought about by traumatic severance of the child from its mother, a severance that had occurred before they were psychologically ready for it. Severance from the mother had been experienced as a shattering of the self

because at that stage in development the mother is not experienced by the child as a separate entity. Another way of putting it would be to say that the psychotic depression had been preceded by an appalling loss that has not been mourned.

Around this black hole these children erected a fortress that cut them off almost totally from any form of emotional contact. Tustin found that she was able to make contact with these children through interpretations based on this fundamental understanding. In addition to the interpretations, she found it necessary to keep to a firm framework of regular times, and she was careful not to indulge the child. She kept to this pattern despite the child trying to get her to relinquish it. She found that the maintenance of emotional firmness brought about in the children what one might call a mental muscle within, which enabled them to begin to drop the fortress walls—in other words, with sufficient inner muscle they had no need to maintain an exoskeleton. They then began to replace the exoskeleton with an inner skeleton.

I think Tustin's autism is another way of describing an extreme form of narcissism. I will now consider this, and the reasons why Tustin's technique reveals, in reverse order, how the narcissistic state comes into being.

Developmentally the idea is that autoerotism precedes narcissism. This was the way Freud conceptualized it. However, this formulation was made on the basis that there is no ego in the early stages of development, and as narcissism is a state in which the ego is taken as the erotogenic object, it could not exist when there was no ego. Therefore, a term to describe erotic activity that was confined to the organism had to be found, and this was "autoerotism". However, the thinking of the Object Relations School is that there cannot be just an organism; there cannot be just drive. There is an "I", from birth. (I think that view has been verified by some of the more recent studies of children.) It therefore makes sense to use the term "narcissism".

Tustin's formulation is that autism arises as a result of the premature violation of the symbiotic bond between the mother and the child. She does not go into the question of whether any intentionality enters into this action. Patients in whom there is an autistic area noticeably take the easy way out; they do not

fight or struggle. They go the way of the marshmallow mother. But patients were able to reverse this situation when Tustin offered a firm muscular mother in the form of a therapist.

Tustin believes that it is this primordial wrenching away from maternal anchoring that initiates the autistic state of affairs. In terms of the theory I am proposing, it is this wrench, the primordial trauma, that brings about the turning-away response. It is clear to me that autism is narcissism.

The approach of Heinz Kohut

When I was at the Tavistock Clinic, I would criticize Melanie Klein more formidably than other psychoanalysts just to challenge people to think; I want to be critical of Heinz Kohut here for the same reason, because there is a tendency in some circles to accept his theories unquestioningly.

To present an extremely abbreviated version of Kohut's theory: he says we maintain cohesion, vitality, and strength of the self through the support of selfobjects. Selfobjects are those figures that exist in attuned, empathic relationship to us. The failure of such relationships in childhood is at the root of all psychopathology. The therapist's task is to create an empathic relationship with the patient, who then internalizes this selfobject relationship. Kohut believes therefore that therapy is a corrective, emotional experience. In his book, *How Does Analysis Cure?* (Kohut, 1984), he gives the following examples of mature selfobject relations: an increased capacity to be reassured by a friend wordlessly putting their arm round one's shoulder; the ability to feel strengthened and uplifted when listening to music; the ability to exhibit joyfully the products of one's creativity in order to obtain the approval of a responsive selfobject audience.

Psychological maturity

Kohut's definition of mature dependency is, thus, the capacity to enjoy the encouragement of another, the approval of an audience. What sort of problem exists when a person is unable

to receive the encouragement of another? We know very well the person steeped in negativity, who immediately deprecates the praise of a friend or the approval of an audience. To overcome this and to be able to receive praise or approval is clearly a psychological and emotional advance. However, I would not define maturity by the capacity to receive such encouragement but, rather, by the inner actions that bring about this capacity. This may be obvious, and it may be implied in Kohut's writings, but he does not state it. It seems to me to be an important distinction.

Kohut's emphasis is on our ability to receive such social rewards, but he does not differentiate between an action aimed solely at achieving these and a loving, sharing, or giving action that may or may not result in praise. He does not therefore distinguish between narcissism and object love. This is consistent with his view that the goal of psychoanalysis is a transformed narcissism, which he defines as: "A redistribution of the patient's narcissistic libido, and of the integration of primitive psychological structures into the mature personality." But a redistribution is not a transformation.

I believe that there is a good deal of confusion in Kohut. Although he launched his theory in opposition to the ego psychology of Heinz Hartmann, he has built his self psychology on Hartmann's libido theory. What is really meant by narcissistic libido, for instance? In Kohut's construct it does not have a subjective source. It thus becomes something to be redistributed. He is still rooted in Hartmann's drive theory. If you start trying to unpack all this, I guarantee you will end in a muddle.

Another point: to define maturity in this way makes no allowance for those extreme life situations where a person may be deprived of praise and comfort. His definition is inadequate and does not allow for heroic action.

The mechanics of internalization

Kohut says that mental health comes about through the internalization of empathic selfobjects. How does this take place, and by what sort of act does it come about? Kohut says that in the absence of attuned selfobjects no internalization takes

place. Why does no internalization occur, and who determines that it does not? If it is instinctual, what is the instinct that determines it? Is it an instinct that takes in the good and rejects the bad automatically? He has no adequate theory to explain this internalization. He allows no place for internal determinants. The predicate is that a person's psychopathology is due to unattuned selfobjects, so all the bad is out there and we have a theory with a paranoid base.

The level of selfobject internalization

Kohut says that the failure of this internalization results in an inner emptiness. The internalization of empathic selfobjects in later life—in therapy, for instance—then builds a secure foundation for the personality. However, Kohut's theory requires that we live surrounded by mirroring and idealizing selfobjects in order to maintain a cohesive sense of self. His writings leave one in no doubt that he does not mean by this just the internal possession of good objects, but that the self needs these external mirrors and idealizing connections. To need these means that the internal possession is not a deep one.

My clinical experience tells me that when a person requires such external mirrors, idealizations, and encouragement it is because of a bad experience or, in Fairbairn's terms, bad objects inside. Reluctantly I reach the conclusion that Kohut does not seem to be aware of this because he defines narcissism without this inner negative critic. I think this is one of the reasons why in some recent literature a distinction is made between negative narcissism and positive narcissism. As I said earlier, I do not think they ever exist dissociated from one another.

The meaning of narcissism

Kohut defines narcissism as a condition where the object is loved, merged with, and idealized. Through a redistribution of libido we become attached to ideals and values, instead of to our own archaic selves. He does not consider that this theory

fits the individual who escapes from bad inner negativity into idealized objects outside. I have discussed the way that Anna turns Vronsky into her ideal object and is then in a state of hatred and desiring revenge when that idealization breaks down. When Vronsky begins to turn bad for her, she is thrown back on herself, the inner assassin.

Is there any evidence that Kohut himself needed an idealized external object? In a paper entitled "Reminiscences", the psychoanalyst William Gillespie (1990) says:

I often had a friendly conversation at Central Executive meetings with Heinz Kohut; he enjoyed exchanges in German. He sent me an advance copy of his book *The Analysis of the Self*, which I read with great interest—I suppose it was what Kuhn would call a new paradigm. Two years later, at the 1973 Paris Congress, he held a "working party" on it. His conduct of this, leaving no room to speak for anyone but himself and his principal supporter, Ornstein, led, when he asked for my comments afterwards, to criticism from me which was doubtless quite unexpected; this led to the end of our friendship, for I had evidently mortally wounded his narcissism. [pp. 18–19]

It is unfair to base too much on such evidence, but such an incident would suggest that there is an intolerably bad critical inner object, in this case represented by Gillespie, which has to be repudiated. I mention this to suggest that his phenomenological description of narcissism leaves out a crucial element: the severe critical inner object that always accompanies it.

Corrective emotional experience

Kohut thinks that the therapist provides the emotional experience that can make up for or correct the deficient self-object attunement in childhood. In my view it is the inner action of the patient that corrects the experience. The therapist's job is to understand and illuminate the currents of the inner world, and it is in the light of this experience that the patient corrects the experience through inner mental activity. Freud said that the

analyst analyses but the synthetic function, the function where parts become integrated, is provided by the patient. In "Lines of Advance in Psycho-Analytic Therapy" (1919a [1918]), he says:

. . . the neurotic patient presents us with a torn mind, divided by resistances. As we analyse it and remove resistances, it grows together; the great unity which we call his ego fits into itself all the instinctual impulses which before had been split off and held apart from it. The psycho-synthesis is thus achieved during analytic treatment without our intervention, automatically and inevitably. [p. 161]

Review of the above-mentioned theories

Crudely, the theories I have mentioned can be divided into trauma theories and phobia theories. Fairbairn, Winnicott, Tustin, and Kohut have all developed trauma theories. Melanie Klein and her followers have developed phobia theories. In trauma theories some real external happening causes a narcissistic situation. In phobia theories the infant takes flight from unbearable anxiety within by projecting the anxiety situation into an external object and then taking flight from that. Between the adherents of these two sets of theories there is intense feeling, as if this very division represents intense anxiety.

What I have called the phobia theories are nearly all encompassed by Kleinian clinicians. The central focus of the Kleinians is upon the intense anxiety existing within the personality. The anxiety is a fear of annihilation, and its source is the death instinct within. The subject has the capacity to push away the anxiety and locate it in external objects. Usually the external objects are people of the environment, but in more extreme states of mental disturbance the anxiety also can become located in physical objects. So, for instance, an old woman I was treating believed that her conversations were being listened to by a bug planted in the sole of her shoe, and a man thought he was being watched by his telephone. In such a situation the person feels persecuted and tortured by figures in

the environment. Kleinian interpretations focus on the different parts of the self, and in the language of communication the analyst understands the figures of the external environment as symbolic of the actions of these different parts of the self. Therefore when a patient is complaining that his mother treats him cruelly, he would probably be understood to be referring to part of the personality that is torturing his ego and also to the way he unconsciously treats the figures of his intimate environment. A clinician based on a trauma theory will assume that the man is communicating the way his mother really treats him and will empathize with him. Through the empathy the patient feels a solidarity against the mother and is strengthened thereby. The clinician based on a trauma theory takes the patient's statements about his mother as real and not as symbolic. The patient finds therefore a figure who acts as a comfort.

I think there is a lacuna in both sets of theories. My position regarding the trauma theories is that there is an intentional response to the traumata of our lives, even in infancy, and that the narcissistic response is the turning away and the fashioning of that particular option. What is wrong with the phobia theories? According to my formulation there is a choice at this deep level, and the *lifegiver* is an inner and outer object. The cause of the phobia is not as Melanie Klein has described. The bad inner objects have been fashioned through this basic refusal, not through the presence of a death instinct within.

CHAPTER TEN

The effects of narcissism on character

I have said several times that I think it is a mistake to split narcissism into positive and negative; in my experience they constitute a single entity. Kit Bollas, in his book *Forces of Destiny* (1989), divides narcissism into these two categories, but what he characterizes as anti-narcissism is, in my view, the hidden part of narcissism:

The anti-narcissist opposes his destiny. As he forecloses his true self, refusing to use objects to articulate his idiom, he is of special interest to me. For as he negates his destiny, this anti-elaborative person "stews in his own juice" and adamantly refuses to nurture himself. He may come to an analyst precisely in order to defeat the aims of analysis. [p. 159]

On the surface it looks as though the person has a healthy love of himself, but Bollas discovers that there is an enemy within the camp—a fifth columnist who destroys harmonious discourse. Bollas says:

My sense of a mutual destiny, involving reciprocal object use, was the very factor Giovanni evoked in me in order to destroy it. [p. 160]

Of his mother, Giovanni said to Bollas, "I was her *darling*, she thought I could do *no wrong*". When he spoke of her loving him in this way, it symbolized the nature of his love of himself. But Bollas says that Giovanni experienced this love as a rejection, because it was a love that rejected the part of him that attacked "my sense of a mutual destiny". The part of him that attacked mutuality, harmony, and intercourse was rejected. The angry, jealous little Oedipus that tries to destroy the parents' coming together is the one who was rejected. The mother's love was, then, a trap. Love of this sort spells death because it does not accept this destructive little child.

My experience is that idealized love of self is always accompanied by this one within that attacks fertilizing mutuality, and my interpretation is that it comes about as a secondary result of the rejection of the *lifegiver*. Parental mutuality, coming together, intercourse is the source of life, of potential, and it is this that is refused. What the analyst or therapist meets is this refusal. The inner attacker is usually so intolerable that it is projected outside, and in its outer form it is experienced as a "phobic object". This is not always obvious, for the person may be quite benign towards the world, but there will always be one hated person, a hated group of people, a hated ideology. It is this inner destroyer that damages the person's talent. Bollas says:

In a curious way, the anti-narcissist envies his own abilities. He hates his talent, because it is this factor which deprives him of true dependence on the mother. [p. 167]

Bollas charts his journey of discovery very clearly, and I agree with everything he says about this part of the personality, which attacks the person's best qualities. I also know well how it came as a surprise to him. I believe, however, that it is a mistake to call it anti-narcissism—in narcissism there is the idealized and the denigrated and the two are held together—the refusal of the *lifegiver* is a choice that encompasses in the same act an exaggerated choice of the self.

Spheres of activity

Throughout, I have made a distinction between motor activity and emotional activity, or what is quite frequently referred to as action in phantasy. It is unfortunate that when the term "phantasy" is used people nearly always think that one is talking about something unreal, whereas action in phantasy is real psychic activity. It is action that affects the mental and emotional processes within the agent, and it also affects those same processes in the minds of those who come into close contact with the person.

However, this distinction between motor activity and psychic activity is not quite correct. What we are concerned with is not motor activity in itself, but the sources of such activity—in other words, with what motivates the activity. The distinction being drawn is between two poles: one in which I am the source of my own action, where I have a creative capacity that comes from my own source of action, and the other in which an inner figure opposed to myself is the source of action.

Using shorthand, I will call these sources of action the "autonomous source" and the "discordant source". The autonomous source is the degree to which there has been an option for the *lifegiver*, and the discordant source is when the *lifegiver* has been repudiated.

Action can, therefore, have an autonomous source or a discordant source, although the source is neither purely autonomous nor purely discordant. Action coming from an autonomous source is creative in the way that Graham Greene described Herbert Read as being creative. By far the most important sphere of creativity is in the social environment; specific artistic creation is a pale reflection of it. Action flowing from a discordant source strangles creativity. It is, in its essence, negative. Such action controls the operation of the mind—perception, cognition, memory, judgement, imagination—and it also controls the mental and emotional operations of those close to the person. When two such people are married to each other, they make hell for each other, because they strangle each other's mental capacities.

When we speak of motor activity, we mean an action considered in itself, divorced from the source, which is a logical,

not a real possibility. The effect of an action will depend upon its source. Sometimes quite a small action can generate a considerable rage. Frequently an activity that comes from a discordant source is denied. "I just opened my umbrella", said the man who hit the woman in the eye with it. "Just" is the great give-away word. Listen to how often you hear it. The word "just" is supposed to mean that the action had no source. There is always a source. The patient leaving the consulting room slams the door and says next time, "I only meant to make sure it was closed". "Concreteness" is the psychiatric term used to refer to such action divorced within from the source. When you are divorced from the source, then you cannot know it. Remember, the narcissist must not know; he will live for a long time, as long as he does not know himself. Disconnection is essential.

I have tried throughout to show that actions take place in the psyche below the threshold of awareness. The discordant source disconnects the motor activity from its source. Those acting from a discordant source benefit in that they can sail on in ignorance of this source. They do not have to know the nature of the traitor they harbour within. At the same time, however, they suffer the effects of the discordant source. The processes of their mind are always being interfered with and being cut off from the source of action, and so they are always victim.

Another principle must also be considered. When there has been action from the discordant source, the rest of the personality is cut off from the autonomous source. When the personality is victim to the discordant source, the subject feels victim to external pressures. An example may help to clarify matters.

The cauliflower man

I was treating a man who frequently used to be talking at the time when the session should have been ending, and I would tend to let him go on a bit. On this particular occasion I stopped him and said it was the end of the session. He seemed quite unconcerned, but the next day he appeared a quarter of an hour late. He explained as he came in how this had happened.

His wife had asked him to buy a cauliflower on the way, so he had obediently gone to the greengrocer, but as it happened the greengrocer did not have any good cauliflowers. So he went to another greengrocer, where he finally bought the cauliflower. However, this shop had been out of his way. He then told me that he had not been going to buy the cauliflower on the way, because he realized it would make him late, but he saw the greengrocer's shop from the car window and made a lightning decision to stop and buy it. Something hit him.

I thought to myself that he was talking about the sudden change of direction at the previous day's session, when I told him he had to stop. I said to him, "When I stopped you at the end of the session yesterday, you made a lightning decision inside yourself to shut off Symington, and this anti-Symington person was very pleased to accord with your wife's request to buy a cauliflower on your way to the session, and even more pleased when the first greengrocer wouldn't oblige, forcing you to snub Symington yet more." (I might mention that he was not known for being obedient to his wife.)

He then said: "When you ended the session yesterday, I said to myself, 'God, you're merciless'; then I felt hopeless."

The way he confirmed the interpretation was illuminating. He remembered suddenly saying to himself, "God, you're merciless", and in the saying there was an action—he cut himself off. I had cut him off by, in effect, saying, "We must stop this conversation now". Frustrated and hurt, his response was to cut off inwardly—a much more serious cutting off. When he cut himself off inwardly he killed something in himself. As I said in connection with the erotization of the self, a psychic killing generates excitement and gives motivational energy, but the autonomous source feels hopeless.

I pointed out to him that he felt hopeless because he had not said to me, "God, you're merciless". Had he done so, then I would have *known* how he felt; I would have been with him. I would have been in tune with him. What I had to do instead was to make that interpretation, make that reconstruction through my intellect, because no feelings were available—they had been cut off. It would have been quite different if he had come in the following day and said, "I've come late because you bloody well finished the session in that way yesterday", because then he

would have been in communication with himself and with me. Therapeutically, it can be quite a problem getting at the fact that the patient has constructed the whole thing. I have had patients who have not just brought in one person but have co-opted a whole organization. Their story sounds concrete, and yet there is an overwhelming sense that the external environment is being manipulated to bring about certain events. The person is actually in a state of victimhood.

Had I relied on appearances and a friend had asked me, "Did So-and-so mind you stopping him in the middle of the conversation?" I should have answered, "No, he seemed quite happy. He didn't seem to mind." What he had done was to cut himself off from the autonomous source within himself. However, the discordant source cannot be owned because it is so savage. Unbearable things in the psyche are dealt with in a variety of ways, and in this case the unbearable thing was propelled into the wife, who made a request that was not in accordance with the desire of the autonomous source, which was to come to the session on time. If he had said what he felt to me, it would have come from his autonomous source, and then, when his wife had made this request, he might have said: "Well, I'll get it on the way home." It was his discordant source that cut him off and gave him the words, "God, you're merciless". He cut himself off from life-giving contact, and immediately this cut-off occurred his feelings were no longer a register of his inner state of affairs. False feelings were substituted for true feelings. Here was a man alienated from his feelings and from knowledge. We also see that he projected this killer into his wife, who inaugurated the anti-Symington campaign—although it was not an anti-Symington campaign, of course, but an anti-himself campaign. What had occurred was the source of a pathology.

Narcissism is the source of all mental disturbance

The bold claim I want to make is that this route, which is taken as a reaction to pain, is the source of all pathology. Narcissism is the source of all mental disturbance. The patient was hurt

when I finished the session in the way I did. His "*amour propre*", his love of himself, his erotized self, had been hurt. Once such a process has been put in train, the discordant source then attacks the mental processes: perception, memory, imagination, thinking, judgement, conscience, emotions, and feelings. Cut off from these processes within himself, the patient's perception of why he was late was wrong.

What actions can the discordant source perform? It paralyzes the autonomous source; it detaches feelings from their true locus and attaches them to the exact reverse; it falsifies judgement; it splits intellect from feeling and enslaves reason to the discordant source—a process called rationalization; it expels a psychic constellation from inside the mind into an outer figure, thereby impoverishing the mind; it implodes an outer object into the inner constellation—the patient's wife becomes his authoritarian goddess. You can see, then, how vicious the original action is where he feels, "God, you're merciless", but does not speak it.

To spell out the further consequences of these processes would mean no less a task than the writing of a detailed psychiatric textbook. I can only give you an impressionistic sketch of the extensive psychiatric conditions that result from activities that constellate around a discordant source—action patterns that get going in reaction to frustration and pain. Such action patterns place the discordant source in power, which has its base in the grandiose self. As soon as I become grandiose I can, like Jesus, calm the storm. I can do anything. The grandiose figure has all the powers of a god.

*The mental havoc fashioned
by the discordant source*

I will now sketch out the mental havoc fashioned by the discordant source. I will start with perception. For instance, I might believe that my mother is very jealous and possessive of me, and I may believe then that she has had it in for me since my early days. I may believe that she has not wanted me to develop into a flourishing and creative adult. I give this as the

reason for my present misfortune. This is a paranoid view, not because my mother is not jealous and possessive—perhaps she is—and not because she does not want me to develop into a flourishing and creative adult—perhaps she does not. It is paranoid because I have consented to her wishes. This consent, a repudiation of the *lifegiver*, is the inner action that falsifies my perception. It is a false perception of my inner relation to the other object. I have no responder within.

I was travelling to Australia once and found myself sitting on the plane next to a middle-aged Englishwoman. She had seven children, and she told me about each one; it was a long journey, so she had time. She came to the last one—let's call him Johnny—and she said, "But when it came to Johnny, I kept him to look after Mum". So Johnny stayed at home. He was 33 at the time. All the others she had let go, but not Johnny. The problem, from Johnny's point of view, was that he consented to it. That was why it was paranoid. My patient did not have to consent to buying the cauliflower. And it is not only that. I am quite certain that Johnny would have played into his mother's perception that he must look after her. If Johnny had been psychologically active in a different way, that would have generated a different response in the mother.

I now want to return again to the cauliflower man. When I made the interpretation to him, he affirmed it by saying that he really had said to himself, "God, you're merciless". Somewhat later in the conversation he then told me that a little earlier he would not even have been aware of that thought. He was making the point, therefore, that this was an improved state of affairs. He was able to be aware of this thought, this action of his, and to acknowledge it to me. This was a step forward, because in the narcissistic disposition it goes profoundly against the grain to have to acknowledge that one is affected by another.

This thought of his had certainly existed previously, because other mental phenomena had been evident. For instance, he would utterly forget the content of a Friday session by the following Monday. He could not extrapolate knowledge between spheres (what psychologists call "transfer of training"). He was "forbidden" to think about certain things. His mental life showed signs of being continually ravaged, particularly after

there had been a break. It was evident that the ravages were connected with his interactions with me—his inner actions in response to my rejections. Ending a session or going away for a holiday is always a rejection; the therapist turns towards somebody else—patient, spouse, child, friend.

It was indeed an improvement when he was aware of the action and of his own agency in it. I looked upon this as the fruit of the foregoing analysis and concluded that this was a sign that the disowning action was less intense. You may want to question this. I based my conclusion on the principle that an individual becomes aware of actions that are destructive to mental life only when the actions are less intense; an action that can be thought about is less intense than one that cannot. For instance, when I am intensely jealous, I cannot be aware of it. I consider this principle as enormously important, but to prove it would require considerable discursive enquiry; here I want only to state that inner actions vary in intensity. With this man the savagery of the inner action had become less intense, and I believe this occurred through an increase in inner creative action. (I might say I had confronted the savagery, especially early in treatment, with a determination that, I believe, was equally intense.) Only when there is a blossoming of inner creative activity can the person then see the shadow, as it were, of the other. When something is tremendously dominant, you cannot see it. When there is a light shining, you can see shadows.

There is an adage that states that a certain additional quantum of intensity alters quality. If one of you says something that hurts me and I say, "Heavens, you're cruel", this is quite different from jumping up, shouting, breaking all the windows, and setting the place on fire. Likewise, when the man in question thinks, "God, you're merciless", it is qualitatively different from him wrecking his capacity to think, to make judgements, and to remember. Wrecking his mind is far worse than my breaking the windows and setting the place on fire, but it is not as evident, so it can go undetected.

All this is to illustrate that the cauliflower man's pathology was serious—his feelings were cut off from his intellect, his knowledge of his own action was eradicated, he had propelled a part of his functioning into his wife, and he had seriously reduced the power of his own creative autonomous action—but

the state of his mind had been far worse previously. When a situation such as this is intensified by a certain magnitude, we have a schizophrenic condition. Imagine that this man had violently propelled that part of him into "God" rather than his wife, and instead of hearing his wife telling him to buy a cauliflower, he had heard God telling him to do something. Not only has he hacked his intellect away from his feelings, but he has smashed his feelings and his capacity for judgement into smithereens. Now we have someone who is hearing voices, his speech flowing on without thought, a dissociation from affective states, and an expulsion of the part that had been in collaboration (in the case of the cauliflower man, in collaboration with me) into another part of the mind or body. What we have is not only a schizophrenic condition, but also a whole host of psychosomatic conditions.

As I said, it would be possible to trace most of the conditions described in a psychiatric textbook along the lines I am suggesting. For this reason, I believe that narcissism, in the way I have been describing it, lies at the base of most mental disturbance.

A new approach to narcissism

I have been sharing my thinking on the subject of narcissism, but what I have said does not, by any means, constitute a final statement. I am making a beginning, a first groping for solutions. At each point new questions arise. I am sympathetic to a statement made by the German theologian, Karl Rahner (1961). He said that if a question disturbs all the accepted views on a subject, if it causes people to be anxious and sets them to defending old positions with ardour, then the right question has been asked. Of one thing I am certain. Current theories of narcissism are not right; they are going down an old pathway. I believe we need to rethink things radically and be prepared to abandon some preconceptions. I hope you will not accept what I have said without further thinking, but I also hope that you will not reject my ideas because they do not tally with other theories.

I think this question of narcissism is crucial. It is a personal problem in each of us which we have to solve. I believe that if we understand some of the processes that determine it in us, we may be in a better position to become creative architects of our own lives, to stand for more worthwhile values in our society, and to achieve that elusive quality called happiness. It can be a first step in the conquest of personal alienation. As many social theorists have said, alienation in all its ramifications is the source of the modern malaise. Marx tried to solve the alienation of humans from themselves through a political charter, and I think his solution has largely failed. Darwin tried to solve it through re-rooting us to our ancestral roots. Freud tried to solve it through linking us up with our unknown selves.

That narcissism cuts us from our own creative source of action, I am sure. That our job is to repair our own minds, I am sure. That true creative action provides the occasion for new harmonies in society, I am sure. Our first task is to harness our potential for creative action. Once we do this, our symptoms and our pathology will subside. Learning the direction for healthy action will be the best weapon against neurosis, psychosis, and pathological states. Our present theories and outlooks are not helping us much. Throughout this book I have repeatedly emphasized the need to look for what is *not* done. Seeing what has been refused will enable us to see what constitutes mental health.

I want to end by quoting a statement made by Dr Aziz in E. M. Forster's novel, *A Passage to India* (1974). He is in conversation with Hamidullah, who says to him:

"Very well, but your life must continue a poor man's; no holidays in Kashmir for you yet, you must stick to your profession and rise to a highly paid post, not retire to a jungle state and write poems. Educate your children, read the latest scientific periodicals, compel European doctors to respect you. Accept the consequences of your own actions like a man."

Aziz winked at him slowly and said: "We are not in the law courts. There are many ways of being a man; mine is to express what is deepest in my heart."

"To such a remark there is certainly no reply," said Hamidullah, much moved. [p. 263]

The crucial words here are, "There are many ways of being a man". A person's inner life is not a given, it is a construction. My life is ultimately my own creation; narcissism smothers that creation, does not allow it, prevents energy from being available to make it possible. The theory presented here is an attempt to make that explicit and to provide a conceptual basis. It is an outline that I hope might point us in the right direction.

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