

ined—is threatened, the disturbed individual responds to the interpersonal world with either more intense expressions of neediness or rage.

Fairbairn's vision of the inner world elaborates on Klein's by providing a more detailed picture of various types of object relations as well as the ego states associated with them. In the process, he paints a somewhat different picture regarding the nature of good and bad objects. For Klein, the badness of an object is a product of the child's own innate destructiveness projected onto an external object, typically the mother. For Fairbairn, just the opposite is true. Badness in his view is an internalized aspect of parents who actually are depriving, frustrating, or rejecting.

Fairbairn's view of infant psyche, in sum, is one in which interactions with the mother produce splits in the inner object world. These, in turn, form the basis for splits in the child's emerging ego states. Fairbairn's object relations are more purely relational than Klein's in that real interactions rather than fantasy are afforded primary consideration. Despite his retention of traditional analytic terminology (libido, anti-libidinal, etc.), Fairbairn was one of the first to give meaning to the object relational contention that an ego or true self never develops outside the context of interpersonal relationships.

MARGARET MAHLER

The object relationist who perhaps most decisively placed the mother-child interaction in a developmental context was Margaret Mahler. A Viennese pediatrician, Mahler's interest in the faulty object relations of psychotic children led her to consider discontinuities in the early mother-child relationship. It was her careful study of autistic and other highly disturbed youngsters that led her to appreciate the psychological significance of the child's early attachment to the mother.

Mahler's study of disturbed children eventually evolved into a vision of normal childhood development. By careful observation of the interaction between mother and child in the first few months of life, she was able to chart the nature of early bonding. She saw this bonding and the child's primitive efforts to establish a separate identity as the beginning of a lifelong process called "separation-individuation." Mahler's description of this process and the interactions that fuel it gives her formulation "a simplicity and lyrical power which has made it perhaps the most compelling vision of early childhood since Freud's depiction of the oedipal complex" (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983, p. 273).

The overall sequence of maturation, as Mahler sees it, is a process in which the child moves from a position of symbiotic attachment to the

mother to the realization of a stable autonomous identity (Mahler, 1952). This process is marked by three major developmental phases: the autistic phase, the symbiotic phase, and the separation-individuation phase, the latter made up of a series of subphases. It is within the separation-individuation phase that life's major conflict—the longing for autonomy versus the urge to stay fused with the mother—is played out most intensely. The degree to which children resolve the conflict determines the extent to which they can go through life without pathological consequences.

According to Mahler, the first, or autistic, phase, begins with birth and lasts for three or four weeks (Mahler, Pine, and Bergman, 1975). During this period the infant operates as a closed system and typically is unaware of others in the interpersonal sense of the word. It is true that the infant seeks out the breast for sustenance, but much of this is guided by a rooting reflex rather than an awareness that there is another human being "out there" who is responsive to its needs. The infant during this early period of life is concerned primarily with tension reduction and has little awareness that another person is responsible for it.

It is not until somewhere in the beginning of the second month that the connection between tension reduction and the child's primary caretaker (typically the mother) is made. This marks the beginning of the symbiotic phase, which lasts from approximately the fifth week till about the fifth month. But even though the mother is in the child's awareness in primitive ways (she dimly is connected with feelings of warmth and fullness), she is not yet experienced as an autonomous presence. The world of the infant is still very much "pre-objectal."

It is during this period of life that the smiling response first occurs in response to the mother's face. Though this seems to connote a certain degree of separateness, Mahler points out that the infant still continues to experience the mother as if she were part of the same interpersonal system. Thus, the infant may react in a distressed manner when the mother is emotionally upset, even though food, warmth, and other physical requirements are present. At this stage of life, differentiation is still a distant goal.

These primitive "pre-objectal" experiences contain the seeds of early splitting. Pleasurable experiences are categorized as "good" while painful ones are classified as "bad." Together they form the basis for memory traces which are the precursors of later interpersonal splits. At this point, though, there is no experience of oneself as a separate human being, no differentiation between the mother and an infant "self," only the experience of symbiotic oneness.

The next and most complex phase, separation-individuation, is made up of a series of subphases, each of which signals a unique form of movement

major conflict

what
autistic
psych
disorder

different
than
Klein

summary

what is
maturation?