

FORMS AND TRANSFORMATION OF NARCISSISM

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Part I

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Although in theoretical discussions it will usually not be disputed that narcissism, the libidinal investment of the self,¹ is per se neither pathological nor obnoxious, there exists an understandable tendency to look at it with a negatively toned evaluation as soon as the field of theory is left. Where such a prejudice exists it is undoubtedly based on a comparison between narcissism and object love, and is justified by the assertion that it is the more primitive and the less adaptive of the two forms of libido distribution. I believe, however, that these views do not stem primarily from an objective assessment either of the developmental position or of the adaptive value of narcissism, but that they are due to the improper intrusion of the altruistic value system.

This essay consists of extracts from a larger study of certain aspects of narcissism, currently in preparation, which will deal more broadly and deeply not only with the topics introduced at this time, but also with a variety of other, related subject matters (with the phenomenon of narcissistic rage, for example; with the therapeutic implications of the theoretical views which are expressed here; and with their application to the investigation of some sociocultural phenomena). The completed study will contain a number of extensive references to clinical material and a review of the relevant literature which had to be omitted in the present context.

1. For the delimitation of narcissism as "strictly defined, libidinal cathexis of the self" and its differentiation from other libido distributions (such as those employed by ego functions or in "self-interest") see Hartmann.

¹ Alexander, F. Remarks about the relation of inferiority feelings to guilt feelings *Int. J. Psychoanal.* 19:41-49 1938

2. Federn's statements in line with this approach were conjoined to form a chapter of the volume *Ego Psychology and the Psychoses*. Here, too, however, as is true with so many other of Federn's fascinating insights into ego psychology, the formulations remain too close to phenomenology, i.e., to the introspected experience, and are thus hard to integrate with the established body of psychoanalytic theory of Western civilization. Whatever the reasons for them, these value judgments exert a narrowing effect on clinical practice. They tend to lead to a wish from the side of the therapist to replace the patient's narcissistic position with object love, while the often more appropriate goal of a transformed narcissism (i.e., of a redistribution of the patient's narcissistic libido, and of the integration of the primitive psychological structures into the mature personality) is neglected. On the theoretical side, too, the contribution of narcissism to health, adaptation, and achievement has not been treated extensively.² This predilection, however, is justifiable on heuristic grounds since the examination of the relatively silent states of narcissism in equilibrium is clearly less fruitful than the scrutiny of narcissism in states of disturbance. The disturbances of narcissistic balance to which we refer as "narcissistic injury" appear to offer a particularly promising access to the problems of narcissism, not only because of the frequency with which they occur in a broad spectrum of normal and abnormal psychological states but also because they are usually easily recognized by the painful affect of embarrassment or shame which accompanies them and by their ideational elaboration which is known as inferiority feeling or hurt pride.

In Freud's work two complementary directions can be discerned which analysts have tended to follow in their endeavor to fit the occurrence of some instances of narcissistic disequilibrium into a pre-established psychoanalytic context. On the one hand, Freud drew attention to certain functions of the ego which relate to the id, especially to the exhibitionistic aspects of the pregenital drives; i.e., he pointed to potential shame as a motive for defense (the ego's Schamgefühl, its sense of shame) and to the occurrence of shame with failures of the defense. On the other hand, Freud asserted that a part of the child's narcissism is transferred upon his superego, and thus narcissistic tensions occur

² Benedict, R. *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946

in the ego as it strives to live up to the ego ideal. The superego, Freud said, is "the vehicle of the ego ideal by which the ego measures itself, which it emulates, and whose demands for ever greater perfection it strives to fulfil."

I cannot in the present context discuss the numerous contributions in the psychoanalytic and related literature which have followed Freud's lead concerning the two directions of the development of narcissism. Although in certain areas I arrived at conclusions which go beyond the outlines indicated by Freud, the general pattern of my own thought has also been determined by them.

Despite the fact that, in the present study, I shall frequently be referring to well-known phenomena on the psychological surface which can easily be translated into behavioral terms, the concepts employed here are not those of social psychology. The general definition of narcissism as the investment of the self might still be compatible with a transactional approach; but the self in the psychoanalytic sense is variable and by no means coextensive with the limits of the personality as assessed by an observer of the social field. In certain psychological states the self may expand far beyond the borders of the individual, or it may shrink and become identical with a single one of his actions or aims. The antithesis to narcissism is not the object relation but object love. An individual's profusion of object relations, in the sense of the observer of the social field, may conceal his narcissistic experience of the object world; and a person's seeming isolation and loneliness may be the setting for a wealth of current object investments.

The concept of primary narcissism is a good case in point. Although it is extrapolated from empirical observations, it refers not to the social field but to the psychological state of the infant. It comprehends the assertion that the baby originally experiences the mother and her ministrations not as a you and its actions but within a view of the world in which the I-you differentiation has not yet been established. Thus the expected control over the mother and her ministrations is closer to the concept which a grownup has of himself and of the control which he expects over his own body and mind than to the grownup's experience of others and of his control over them.³

³ Bing, McLaughlin, and Marburg consider primary narcissism as a condition "*in which the libido diffusely and in an undifferentiated way is invested in various parts of the organism.*" Their definition thus places primary narcissism as existing prior to the time when a psychological approach begins to be appropriate.

Primary narcissism, however, is not in the focus of the ensuing developmental considerations. Although there remains throughout life an important direct residue of the original position—a basic narcissistic tonus which suffuses all aspects of the personality—I shall turn our attention to two other forms into which it becomes differentiated: the narcissistic self and the idealized parent imago.

The balance of primary narcissism is disturbed by maturational pressures and painful psychic tensions which occur because the mother's ministrations are of necessity imperfect and traumatic delays cannot be prevented. The baby's psychic organization, however, attempts to deal with the disturbances by the building up of new systems of perfection. To one of them Freud (21, p. 136) referred as the "purified pleasure ego,"⁴ a stage in development in which everything pleasant, good, and perfect is considered as part of a rudimentary self, while everything unpleasant, bad, and imperfect is considered as "outside." Or, in contrast to this at first attempted solution, the baby attempts to maintain the original perfection and omnipotence by imbuing the rudimentary you, the adult, with absolute perfection and power.⁵

The cathexis of the psychic representation of the idealized parent imago is neither adequately subsumed under the heading of narcissism nor of object love. Idealization may of course be properly described as an aspect of narcissism, i.e., of the (still undifferentiated) original bliss, power, perfection, and goodness which is projected on the parent figure during a phase when these qualities become gradually separated into perfection pertaining to pleasure, or power, or knowledge, or beauty, or morality. The intimate relationship between idealization and narcissism is attested to by the fact that homosexual libido is always predominantly involved even when the object is of the opposite sex. The ease, furthermore, with which the representation of the idealized object may at various stages of its development be taken back into the nexus of the self through identification is an additional piece of evidence for its narcissistic character, as Freud, following Rank, mentioned when he said that a "narcissistic type of object-choice" may lay the groundwork for the later pathogenic introjection of the depressed. Yet to subsume the idealized object imago under the

⁴ The purified pleasure ego may be considered as a prestage of the structure which is referred to as narcissistic self in the present essay.

⁵ For a discussion of the concept formed by the immature psyche of the all powerful object and the child's relationship to it, see Ferenczi and Jones. See also Sandler et al., who in this context speak of an "*ideal object*."

heading of narcissism is telling only half the story. The narcissistic cathexis of the idealized object is not only amalgamated with features of true object love, the libido of the narcissistic cathexis itself has undergone a transformation, i.e., the appearance of idealizing libido may be regarded as a maturational step sui generis in the development of narcissistic libido and differentiated from the development of object love with its own transitional phases.

Although the idealization of the parent imago is a direct continuation of the child's original narcissism, the cognitive image of the idealized parent changes with the maturation of the child's cognitive equipment. During an important transitional period when gratification and frustration are gradually recognized as coming from an external source, the object alternately emerges from and resubmerges into the self. When separated from the self, however, the child's experience of the object is total at each point of development, and the seemingly objective classification into "part" and "whole" objects rests on the adult observer's value judgment.

Form and content of the psychic representation of the idealized parent thus vary with the maturational stage of the child's cognitive apparatus; they are also influenced by environmental factors that affect the choice of internalizations and their intensity.

The idealized parent imago is partly invested with object-libidinal cathexes; and the idealized qualities are loved as a source of gratifications to which the child clings tenaciously. If the psyche is deprived, however, of a source of instinctual gratification, it will not resign itself to the loss but will change the object imago into an introject, i.e., into a structure of the psychic apparatus which takes over functions previously performed by the object. Internalization (although part of the autonomous equipment of the psyche and occurring spontaneously) is, therefore, enhanced by object loss. In the present metapsychological context, however, object loss should be conceived broadly, ranging from the death of a parent, or his absence, or his withdrawal of affection due to physical or mental disease, to the child's unavoidable disappointment in circumscribed aspects of the parental imago, or a parent's prohibitions of unmodified instinctual demands.

I would not contradict anyone who feels that the term object loss should not be employed for the frustrations imposed by education or other demands of reality. In the context of the preconditions

for the internalization of drive- regulating functions, however, the differences are only quantitative. The kindly rejection of a child's unmodified instinctual demand, even if enunciated in the form of a positive value, is still a frustration which connotes the impossibility of maintaining a specific object cathexis; it may, therefore, result in internalization, and the accretion of drive-regulating psychic structure. The unique position of the superego among the drive-regulating psychic structures is correlated to the fact that the child has to achieve a phase-specific decathexis of his infantile object representations

at the very time when the cathexis had reached the peak of its intensity.

If we apply these considerations to our specific topic, we may say that during the pre-oedipal period there normally occurs a gradual loss of the idealized parent imago and a concomitant accretion of the drive-regulating matrix of the ego, while the massive loss during the oedipal period contributes to the formation of the superego. Every shortcoming detected in the idealized parent leads to a corresponding internal preservation of the externally lost quality of the object.⁶ A child's lie remains undetected; and thus one aspect of the omniscient idealized object is lost; but omniscience is introjected as a minute aspect of the drive- controlling matrix and as a significant aspect of the all-seeing eye, the omniscience of the superego. It is due to the phase-specific massive introjection of the idealized qualities of the object that, as Freud states, the superego must be regarded as the "vehicle of the ego ideal." Or, expressed in another way: the ego ideal is that aspect of the superego which corresponds to the phase-specific, massive introjection of the idealized qualities of the object. The fact that the idealized parent was the carrier of the originally narcissistic perfection and omnipotence accounts now for the omnipotence, omniscience, and perfection of the superego, and

⁶ A whole broad spectrum of possibilities is condensed here. Not only parental illness or death but also the parents' reactions to an illness of a young child may prematurely and traumatically shatter the idealized object imago and thus lead to phase-inappropriate, inadequate, massive internalizations which prevent the establishment of an idealized superego and lead later to vacillation between the search for external omnipotent powers with which the person wants to merge, or to a defensive reinforcement of a grandiose self concept.

Not only premature discovery of parental weakness, however, can lead to trauma in this area; a narcissistic parent's inability to permit the child the gradual discovery of his shortcomings leads to an equally traumatic result. The ultimate confrontation with the parent's weakness cannot be avoided and, when it occurs, the resulting introjection is massive and pathological.

it is due to these circumstances that the values and standards of the superego are experienced as absolute. The fact, however, that the original narcissism has passed through a cherished object before its re-internalization, and that the narcissistic investment itself had been raised to the new developmental level of idealization, accounts for the unique emotional importance of our standards, values, and ideals in so far as they are part of the superego. Psychologically such a value cannot be defined in terms of its content or form. A funny story ceases to be amusing when its content is told without regard to the specific psychological structure of jokes. Similarly, the unique position held by those of our values and ideals which belong to the realm of the superego is determined neither by their (variable) content (which may consist of demands for unselfish, altruistic behavior or of demands for prowess and success) nor by their (variable) form (i.e., whether they are prohibitions or positive values, even including demands for specific modes of drive discharge), but by their genesis and psychic location. It is not its form or content but the unique quality of arousing our love and admiration while imposing the task of drive control which characterizes the ego ideal.

Our next task is the consideration of the narcissistic self. Its narcissistic cathexis, in contrast to that which is employed in the instinctual investment of the idealized parent imago and of the ego ideal, is retained within the nexus of the self and does not make that specific partial step toward object love which results in idealization. The ego ideal is predominantly related to drive control, while the narcissistic self is closely interwoven with the drives and their inexorable tensions. At the risk of sounding anthropomorphic, yet in reality only condensing a host of clinical impressions and genetic reconstructions, I am tempted to say that the ego experiences the influence of the ego ideal as coming from above and that of the narcissistic self as coming from below. Or I might illustrate my point by the use of imagery which pertains to the preconscious derivatives of the two structures and say that man is led by his ideals but pushed by his ambitions. And in contrast to the idealized parent imago which is gazed at in awe, admired, looked up to, and like which one wants to become, the narcissistic self wants to be looked at and admired.

The establishment of the narcissistic self must be evaluated both as a maturationally predetermined step and as a

developmental achievement, and the grandiose fantasy which is its functional correlate is phase-appropriate and adaptive just as is the overestimation of the power and perfection of the idealized object. Premature interference with the narcissistic self leads to later narcissistic vulnerability because the grandiose fantasy becomes repressed and inaccessible to modifying influences.

The narcissistic self and the ego ideal may also be distinguished by the relationship of the surface layers of the two structures to consciousness. Perception and consciousness are the psychological analogue of the sensory organs which scan the surroundings. The fact that the ego ideal has object qualities facilitates, therefore, its availability to consciousness.⁷ Even the surface aspects of the narcissistic self, however, are introspectively hard to perceive since this structure has no object qualities. In a letter to Freud (June 29, 1912) Binswanger mentioned that he "had been struck by his [Freud's] enormous will to power ... to dominate...." Freud replied (July 4, 1912): "I do not trust myself to contradict you in regard to the will to power but I am not aware of it. I have long surmised that not only the repressed content of the psyche, but also the ... core of our ego ["das Eigentliche unseres Ichs," i.e., the essential part of our ego] is unconscious.... I infer this from the fact that consciousness is ... a sensory organ directed toward the outside world, so that it is always attached to a part of the ego which is itself unperceived."

As I mentioned before, the preconscious correlates of the narcissistic self and of the ego ideal are experienced by us as our ambitions and ideals. They are at times hard to distinguish, not only because ambitions are often disguised as ideals but also because there are indeed lucky moments in our lives, or lucky periods in the lives of the very fortunate, in which ambitions and ideals coincide. Adolescent types not infrequently disguise their ideals as ambitions and, finally, certain contents of the ego ideal (demands for achievement) may mislead the observer. If the metapsychological differences, however, are kept in mind, the phenomenological distinction is greatly facilitated.

Our ideals are our internal leaders; we love them and are longing to reach them. Ideals are capable of absorbing a great deal of transformed narcissistic libido and thus of diminishing narcissistic tensions

⁷ These considerations do not apply, of course, when aspects of the ego ideal have become concealed in consequence of endopsychic conflict. Corresponding to the special status of the ego ideal as an internal object, this concealment occupies a position which lies between repression and denial.

and narcissistic vulnerability. If the ego's instinctual investment of the superego remains insufficiently desexualized (or becomes resexualized), moral masochism is the result, a condition in which the ego may wallow in a state of humiliation when it fails to live up to its ideals. In general, however, the ego does not specifically experience a feeling of being narcissistically wounded when it cannot reach the ideals; rather it experiences an emotion akin to longing.

Our ambitions, too, although derived from a system of infantile grandiose fantasies may become optimally restrained, merge with the structure of the ego's goals, and achieve autonomy. Yet here too, a characteristic, genetically determined psychological flavor can be discerned. We are driven by our ambitions, we do not love them. And if we cannot realize them, narcissistic-exhibitionistic tensions remain undischarged, become dammed up, and the emotion of disappointment which the ego experiences always contains an admixture of shame. If the grandiosity of the narcissistic self, however, has been insufficiently modified because traumatic onslaughts on the child's self esteem have driven the grandiose fantasies into repression, then the adult ego will tend to vacillate between an irrational overestimation of the self and feelings of inferiority and will react with narcissistic mortification⁸ to the thwarting of its ambitions.

Before we can pursue our examination of the relationship between the narcissistic self and the ego, however, we must turn our attention to two subsidiary topics: exhibitionism and the grandiose fantasy.

Let me begin with the description of a mother's interaction with her infant boy from the chapter called "Baby Worship" from Trollope's novel *Barchester Towers*. "Diddle, diddle ..., dum ...; hasn't he got

⁸ A whole broad spectrum of possibilities is condensed here. Not only parental illness or death but also the parents' reactions to an illness of a young child may prematurely and traumatically shatter the idealized object imago and thus lead to phase-inappropriate, inadequate, massive internalizations which prevent the establishment of an idealized superego and lead later to vacillation between the search for external omnipotent powers with which the person wants to merge, or to a defensive reinforcement of a grandiose self concept.

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lovely legs?" said the rapturous mother. "... He's a ... little ... darling, so he is; and he has the nicest little pink legs in all the world, so he has.... Well, ... did you ever see?... My naughty ... Johnny. He's pulled down all Mamma's hair...the naughtiest little man....The child screamed with delight...." The foregoing much abbreviated description of a very commonplace scene illustrates well the external surroundings correlated to two important aspects of the child's psychological equipment: his exhibitionistic propensities and his fantasies of grandeur. Exhibitionism, in a broad sense, can be regarded as a principal narcissistic dimension of all drives, as the expression of a narcissistic emphasis on the aim of the drive (upon the self as the performer) rather than on its object. The object is important only insofar as it is invited to participate in the child's narcissistic pleasure and thus to confirm it. Before psychological separateness has been established, the baby experiences the mother's pleasure in his whole body-self, as part of his own psychological equipment. After psychological separation has taken place the child needs the gleam in the mother's eye in order to maintain the narcissistic libidinal suffusion which now concerns, in their sequence, the leading functions and activities of the various maturational phases. We speak thus of anal, of urethral, and of phallic exhibitionism, noting that in the girl the exhibitionism of the urethral-phallic phase is soon replaced by exhibitionism concerning her total appearance and by an interrelated exhibitionistic emphasis on morality and drive control.

The exhibitionism of the child must gradually become desexualized and subordinated to his goal-directed activities, a task which is achieved best through gradual frustrations accompanied by loving support, while the various overt and covert attitudes of rejection and overindulgence (and especially their amalgamations and rapid, unpredictable alternations) are the emotional soil for a wide range of disturbances. Although the unwholesome results vary greatly, ranging from severe hypochondria to mild forms of embarrassment, metapsychologically speaking they are all states of heightened narcissistic-exhibitionistic tension with incomplete and aberrant modes of discharge. In all these conditions the ego attempts to enlist the object's participation in the exhibitionism of the narcissistic self, but after the object's rejection the free discharge of exhibitionistic libido fails; instead of a pleasant suffusion of the body surface there is the heat of unpleasant blushing; instead of a pleasurable confirmation of the value, beauty, and loveliness of the self, there is painful shame.

Now I shall turn to an examination of the position which is held by the grandiose fantasy in the structure of the personality and of the function which it fulfills. While the exhibitionistic-narcissistic urges may be considered as the predominant drive aspect of the narcissistic self, the grandiose fantasy is its ideational content. Whether it contributes to health or disease, to the success of the individual or to his downfall, depends on the degree of its de-instinctualization and the extent of its integration into the realistic purposes of the ego. Take, for instance, Freud's statement that "a man who has been the indisputable favorite of his mother keeps for life the feeling of a conqueror, that confidence of success that often induces real success." Here Freud obviously speaks about the results of adaptively valuable narcissistic fantasies which provide lasting support to the personality. It is evident that in these instances the early narcissistic fantasies of power and greatness had not been opposed by sudden premature experiences of traumatic disappointment but had been gradually integrated into the ego's reality-oriented organization.

We can now attempt to summarize the ultimate influence which is exerted by the two major derivatives of the original narcissism upon the mature psychological organization. Under favorable circumstances the neutralized forces emanating from the narcissistic self (the narcissistic needs of the personality and its ambitions) become gradually integrated into the web of our ego as a healthy enjoyment of our own activities and successes and as an adaptively useful sense of disappointment tinged with anger and shame over our failures and shortcomings. And, similarly, the ego ideal (the internalized image of perfection which we admire and to which we are looking up) may come to form a continuum with the ego, as a focus for our ego-syntonic values, as a healthy sense of direction and beacon for our activities and pursuits, and as an adaptively useful object of longing disappointment, when we cannot reach it. A firmly cathected, strongly idealized superego absorbs considerable amounts of narcissistic energy, a fact which lessens the personality's propensity toward narcissistic imbalance. Shame, on the other hand, arises when the ego is unable to provide a proper discharge for the exhibitionistic demands of the narcissistic self. Indeed, in almost all clinically significant instances of shame propensity, the personality is characterized by a defective idealization of the superego and by a concentration of the narcissistic libido upon the narcissistic self; and it is therefore the ambitious,

success-driven person with a poorly integrated grandiose self concept and intense exhibitionistic-narcissistic tensions

who is most prone to experience shame.⁹ If the pressures from the narcissistic self are intense and the ego is unable to control them, the personality will respond with shame to failures of any kind, whether its ambitions concern moral perfection or external success (or, which is frequently the case, alternatingly the one or the other, since the personality possesses neither a firm structure of goals nor of ideals).

Under optimal circumstances, therefore, the ego ideal and the goal structure of the ego are the personality's best protection against narcissistic vulnerability and shame propensity. In the maintenance of the homeostatic narcissistic equilibrium of the personality, however, the interplay of the narcissistic self, the ego, and the superego may be depicted in the following way. The narcissistic self supplies small amounts of narcissistic-exhibitionistic libido which are transformed into subliminal signals of narcissistic imbalance (subliminal shame signals) as the ego tries to reach its goals, to emulate external examples and to obey external demands, or to live up to the standards and, especially, to the ideals of the superego (i.e., to the "ego ideal ... whose demands for ever greater perfection it strives to fulfil." Or, stated in a whimsical fashion: the narcissistic self attempts to exhibit its perfection to the ego or, indirectly through the mediation of the ego, to the external world or the superego and finds itself wanting; the resulting minute faulty discharge of libido, however, alerts the ego about a potential experience of painful shame.

In contrast to the metapsychological explanation of the emotion of shame presented here, Saul, basing himself on Alexander, and in harmony with the approach of cultural anthropology, compared guilt and shame as parallel phenomena; he suggested a differentiation between these two emotions by specifying that, unlike guilt, shame arises when people are unable to live up to their ideals. The question of the appropriateness of such structural distinctions (cf. especially Piers and Singer's comprehensive statement of this position) is not germane to the present study and will not be pursued

⁹ E. Jacobson, in harmony with A. Reich, speaks cogently of the fact that such patients often blame their high ideals for their "agonizing experiences of anxiety, shame, and inferiority" but that in reality they suffer from conflicts relating to "aggrandized, wishful self images" and "narcissistic-exhibitionistic strivings."

here. It was recently discussed by Hartmann and Loewenstein who maintain that it is inadvisable "to overemphasize the separateness of the ego ideal from the other parts of the superego," a theoretical procedure on which "the structural opposition of guilt and shame hinges."¹⁰

Sandler, Holder, and Meers, on the other hand, retain the ego ideal within the context of the superego. Basing themselves on contributions by Jacobson and A. Reich, however, they postulate the existence of an "ideal self" (as differentiated from the ego ideal), state that the child attempts to "avoid disappointment and frustration by living up to his ideal self," and conclude that shame arises when the individual fails "to live up to ideal standards which he accepts, whereas guilt is experienced when his ideal self differs from that which he feels to be dictated by his introjects."

The interplay between the narcissistic self, the ego, and the superego determines the characteristic flavor of the personality and is thus, more than other building blocks or attributes of the personality, instinctively regarded as the touchstone of a person's individuality or identity.¹¹ In many outstanding personalities this inner balance appears to be dominated more by a well-integrated narcissistic self (which channels the drives) than by the ego ideal (which guides and controls them). Churchill, for example, repeated again and again, in an ever-enlarging arena, the feat of extricating himself from a situation from which there seemed to be no escape by ordinary means. (His famous escape during the Boer war is one example.) I would not be surprised if deep in his personality there was hidden the conviction that he could fly and thus get away when ordinary locomotion was barred. In the autobiographical volume *My Early Life* he describes the following events. During a vacation in the country he played a game in which he was being chased by a cousin and a younger brother. As he was crossing a bridge which led over a ravine he found himself entrapped by his pursuers who had divided their forces. "... capture seemed certain" he wrote, but "in a flash there came across me a great project." He looked at the young fir trees below and decided to leap onto one of them. He computed, he

¹⁰ See also Kohut and Seitz who stress the importance of retaining the conception of the essential "functional and genetic cohesion" of the internal moral forces which reside in the superego, despite the heuristic advantages and the convenience of a differentiation according to the phenomenology of their psychological effects.

¹¹ It is difficult to find an appropriate place in psychoanalysis for the concept of "identity" since, amphibologically, it is equally applicable in social and individual psychology. Under these circumstances an empirical approach to an area vaguely outlined by the impressionistic use of the term seems justified and, indeed, has occasionally (see, for example, Kramer) led to illuminating findings, especially in the realm of psychopathology.

meditated. "In a second, I had plunged," he continues, "throwing out my arms to embrace the summit of the fir tree." It was three days before he regained consciousness and more than three months before he crawled out of bed. Yet although it is obvious that on this occasion the driving unconscious grandiose fantasy was not yet fully integrated, the struggle of the reasoning ego to perform the behest of the narcissistic self in a realistic way was already joined. Luckily, for him and for the forces of civilization, when he reached the peak of his responsibilities the inner balance had shifted.

Part II.

Up to this point I have surveyed the origin, development, and functions of two major forms of narcissism and their integration into the personality. Although the mutual influences between the narcissistic self, the ego, and the ego ideal were not ignored, our attention was focused predominantly on the narcissistic structures themselves and not on the ego's capacity to harness the narcissistic energies and to transform the narcissistic constellations into more highly differentiated, new psychological configurations. There exist, however, a number of acquisitions of the ego which, although genetically and dynamically related to the narcissistic drives and energized by them, are far removed from the preformed narcissistic structures of the personality, and which therefore must be evaluated not only as transformations of narcissism but even more as attainments of the ego and as attitudes and achievements of the personality.¹² Let me first enumerate those whose relationship to narcissism I shall discuss. They are:

- (i) man's creativity;
- (ii) his ability to be empathic;
- (iii) his capacity to contemplate his own impermanence;
- (iv) his sense of humor; and
- (v) his wisdom.

First we will briefly examine the relationship of narcissism to creativity. Like all complex human activities, artistic and scientific creativity serves many purposes, and it involves the whole personality, and thus a wide range of psychological structures and drives. It is therefore to be expected that the narcissism of the creative individual participates in his creative activity, for example, as a spur, driving him toward fame and acclaim. If there existed no further connection between narcissism and creativity, however, than the interplay between ambition and superior executive equipment, there

¹² In his paper on poise Rangell demonstrated the genetic and dynamic interrelatedness of specific drives with a whole integrative attitude of the ego. Poise, to state it in my words, rests on the desexualization of the crudely exhibitionistic cathexis of the narcissistic self and on the permeation of the neutralized libido into the whole physical and mental personality. Although poise may be nearer to the exhibitionistic drives than the various achievements of the ego to be discussed here, it too cannot be fully explained by reference to the drives which supply its fuel but must be considered as a new, broad configuration within the realm of the ego itself.

would be no justification for discussing creativity specifically among the transformations of narcissism. It is my contention, however, that while artists and scientists may indeed be acclaim-hungry, narcissistically vulnerable individuals, and while their ambitions may be helpful in prompting them toward the

appropriate communication of their work, the creative activity itself deserves to be considered among the transformations of narcissism.

The ambitions of a creative individual play an important role in his relationship to the public, i.e., to an audience of potential admirers; the transformation of narcissism, however, is a feature of the creator's relationship to his work. In creative work narcissistic energies are employed which have been changed into a form to which I referred earlier as idealizing libido, i.e., the elaboration of that specific point on the developmental road from narcissism toward object love at which an object (in the sense of social psychology) is cathected with narcissistic libido and thus included in the context of the self.

The analogy to the mother's love for the unborn fetus and for the newborn baby is inviting, and undoubtedly the single-minded devotion to the child who is taken into her expanded self, and her empathic responsiveness to him are similar to the creative person's involvement with his work. Nevertheless, I believe that the creative person's relationship to his work has less in common with the expanded narcissism of motherhood than with the still unrestricted narcissism of early childhood. Phenomenologically, too, the personality of many unusually creative individuals is more childlike than maternal. Even the experiments of some of the great in science impress the observer with their almost childlike freshness and simplicity. The behavior of Enrico Fermi, for example, while witnessing the first atomic explosion is described by his wife in the following way. He tore a piece of paper into small bits and, as soon as the blast had been set off, dropped them, one by one, watching the impact of the shock wave rise and subside.

The creative individual, whether in art or science, is less psychologically separated from his surroundings than the non-creative one; the "I-you" barrier is not as clearly defined. The intensity of the creative person's awareness of the relevant aspects of his surroundings is akin to the detailed self-perceptions of the schizoid and the childlike: it is nearer to a child's relationship to his excretions or to

some schizophrenics' experiences of their body,¹³ than to a healthy mother's feeling for her newborn child.

The indistinctness of "internal" and "external" is familiar to all of us in our relationship to the surrounding air which, as we take it in and expel it, is experienced by us as part of ourselves, while we hardly perceive it as long as it forms a part of our external surroundings. Similarly, the creative individual is keenly aware of those aspects of his surroundings which are of significance to his work and he invests them with narcissistic-idealizing libido. Like the air which we breathe, they are most clearly experienced at the moment of union with the self. The traditional metaphor which is expressed by the term "inspiration" (it refers both to the taking in of air and to the fertilizing influence of an external stimulation upon the internal creative powers) and the prototypical description of creativity ("and the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" [Genesis 2:7]) support the assertion that there exists a close psychological proximity, on the one hand, between respiratory and creative inspiration and, on the other hand, between the coming to life of dust and the creative transformation of a narcissistically experienced material into a work of art.

Greenacre who recently discussed the nature of creative inspiration and who mentions the child's interest in the air as a mysterious unseen force which becomes a symbol for his dreams and thoughts, and for his dawning conscience, maintains that the future creative artist already possesses in infancy not only great sensitivity to sensory stimuli coming from the primary object, the mother, but also to those from peripheral objects which resemble the primary one. She uses the terms "collective alternates" and "love affair with the world" in describing the artist's attitude to his surroundings, and declares that it should not be considered as an expression of his narcissism but that "it partakes of an object relationship, though a collective one ..."

K. R. Eissler, too, refers to the problem of the artist's relationship to reality when he speaks of "automorphic techniques, i.e., artistic activities which take place in a borderland of autoplasmic and

¹³ I treated once a gifted schizoid young woman who at one point gave me an artistically detached, beautiful description of the areolar area of one of her nipples, with an almost microscopic knowledge about the details and a concentrated absorption as if it were the most fascinating landscape.

alloplastic attitudes toward reality. A work of art, he explains, is autoplasmic in so far as, like a dream or symptom, it serves the solution of an inner conflict and the fulfillment of a wish; it is simultaneously alloplastic, however, since it modifies reality by the creation of something original and new.

Greenacre and Eissler approach the problem of creativity from directions which are different from the one taken here, and arrive therefore at different conclusions. I believe, nonetheless, that their findings are consistent with the proposition that the artist invests his work with a specific form of narcissistic libido. Thus Greenacre's observation of the intensity of the future artist's early perception of the world, and of the persistence of this sensitivity during maturity, is in harmony with the contention that a leading part of the psychological equipment of creative people has been shaped through the extensive elaboration of a transitional point in libido development: idealization. In the average individual this form of the narcissistic libido survives only as the idealizing component of the state of being in love, and a surplus of idealizing libido which is not absorbed through the amalgamation with the object cathexis may account for the brief spurt of artistic activity which is not uncommon during this state. The well-established fact, furthermore, that creative people tend to alternate during periods of productivity between phases when they think extremely highly of their work and phases when they are convinced that it has no value, is a sure indication that the work is cathected with a form of narcissistic libido. The spreading of the libidinal investment upon "collective alternates" and ultimately upon "the world," which Greenacre describes, appears to me as an indication of a narcissistic experience of the world (an expanded self which includes the world) rather than as the manifestation of a "love affair" within an unqualified context of object love. The fact, too, that, as Eissler shows convincingly, the work of art is simultaneously the materialization of autoplasmic and alloplasmic psychic processes and that, in certain respects, the artist's attitude to his work is similar to that of the fetishist toward the fetish, lends support to the idea that, for the creator, the work is a transitional object and that it is invested with transitional narcissistic libido. The fetishist's attachment to the fetish has the intensity of an addiction, a fact which is a manifestation not of object love but of a fixation on an early object that is experienced as part of the self. Creative artists, and scientists, may be attached to their work with the intensity of an addiction, and they try to control and shape it with forces and for purposes which belong to a narcissistically experienced world. They are attempting to re-create a

perfection which formerly was directly an attribute of their own; during the act of creation, however, they do not relate to their work in the give-and-take mutuality which characterizes object love.

I am now turning to empathy as the second of the faculties of the ego which, though far removed from the drives and largely autonomous, are here considered in the context of the transformation of narcissism.¹⁴

Empathy is the mode by which one gathers psychological data about other people and, when they say what they think or feel, imagines their inner experience even though it is not open to direct observation. Through empathy we aim at discerning, in one single act of certain recognition, complex psychological configurations which we could either define only through the laborious

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Empathy is an essential constituent of psychological observation and is, therefore, of special importance for the psychoanalyst who, as an empirical scientist, must first perceive the complex psychological configurations which are the raw data of human experience before he can attempt to explain them. The scientific use of empathy, however, is a specific achievement of the autonomous ego

¹⁴ Although, even concerning the other subject matters discussed in this study, I am, within the present limits, often not able to adduce sufficient empirical support for my assertions, the following considerations about empathy are more speculative in essence and, for their verification, are probably in need of a psychoanalytically oriented experimental approach.

¹⁵ The capacity to recognize complex psychological states through empathy has its analogy in the capacity to identify a face in a single act of apperception. Here, too, we do, in general, not add up details or go through complex theories of comparative judgment, and here, too, we are generally unable to define our certain recognition by adducing details. The similarity between the perceptual immediacy of the recognition of a face and the empathic grasp of another person's psychological state may not be only an incidental one; it may well be derived from the significant genetic fact that the small child's perceptual merging with the mother's face constitutes simultaneously its most important access to the mother's identity and to her emotional state presentation of a host of details or which it may even be beyond our ability to define.

since, during the act of empathy, it must deliberately suspend its predominant mode of operation which is geared to the perception of non-psychological data in the surroundings.

The groundwork for our ability to obtain access to another person's mind is laid by the fact that in our earliest mental organization the feelings, actions, and behavior of the mother had been included in our self. This primary empathy with the mother prepares us for the recognition that, to a large extent, the basic inner experiences of people remain similar to our own. Our first perception of the manifestations of another person's feelings, wishes, and thoughts occurred within the framework of a narcissistic conception of the world; the capacity for empathy belongs, therefore, to the innate equipment of the human psyche and remains to some extent associated with the primary process.

Non-empathic forms of cognition, however, which are attuned to objects which are essentially dissimilar to the self become increasingly superimposed over the original empathic mode of reality perception and tend to impede its free operation. The persistence of empathic forms of observation outside of psychology is, indeed, archaic and leads to a faulty, prerational, animistic conception of reality. Non-empathic modes of observation, on the other hand, are not attuned to the experiences of other people and, if they are employed in the psychological field, lead to a mechanistic and lifeless conception of psychological reality.

Non-empathic forms of cognition are dominant in the adult. Empathy must thus often be achieved speedily before non-empathic modes of observation are interposed. The approximate correctness of first impressions in the assessment of people, by contrast with subsequent evaluations, is well known and is exploited by skillful men of affairs. Empathy seems here to be able to evade interference and to complete a rapid scrutiny before other modes of observation can assert their ascendancy. The exhaustive empathic comprehension, however, which is the aim of the analyst requires the ability to use the empathic capacity for prolonged periods. His customary observational attitude ("evenly suspended attention"; avoidance of note taking; curtailment of realistic interactions; concentration on the purpose of achieving understanding rather than on the wish to cure and to help) aims at excluding psychological processes attuned to the non-psychological perception of objects and to encourage empathic comprehension through the perception of experiential identities.

Foremost among the obstacles which interfere with the use of empathy (especially for prolonged periods) are those which stem from conflicts about relating to another person in a narcissistic mode. Since training in empathy is an important aspect of psychoanalytic education, the loosening of narcissistic positions constitutes a specific task of the training analysis, and the candidate's increasing ability to employ the transformed narcissistic cathexes in empathic observation is a sign that this goal is being reached.

Could it be that among the obstacles to the use of empathy is also the resistance against the acknowledgment of unconscious knowledge about others? Could it be that the "I have always known it" of the analysand when an unconscious content is uncovered may correspond an "I have always recognized it" in the analyst when he and the patient arrive at a valid reconstruction, or when the patient supplies a relevant memory?

Freud pondered the question whether thought transference does occur and referred to such biological and social phenomena as the means by which "the common purpose comes about in the great insect communities" and the possibility of the persistence of an "original, archaic method of communication between individuals" which "in the course of phylogenetic evolution ... has been replaced by the better method of giving information with the help of signals," yet which may still "put itself into effect under certain conditions—for instance, in passionately excited mobs" (p. 55). To these statements one could add only that an intentional curbing of the usual cognitive processes of the ego (such as is brought about in the analytic situation) may free the access to empathic communication as does the involuntary trancelike condition which occurs in those who become submerged in an excited mob¹⁶ and that the prototype of empathic understanding must be sought not only in the prehistory of the race but also in the early life of the individual. Under favorable circumstances, however, the faculty of perceiving the psychological manifestations of the mother, achieved through the extension of narcissistic cathexes, becomes the starting point for a series of developmental steps which lead ultimately to a state in which the ego can choose between the use of empathic and nonempathic modes

¹⁶ For a striking description of the ego's perviousness to the dominant mental tendencies of an aroused multitude, and an illuminating discussion of the propensity of the individual who is trapped in an agitated group to shed ego autonomy and to respond regressively in narcissistic-identificatory compliance, see A. Mitscherlich.

of observation, depending on realistic requirements and on the nature of the surroundings that it scrutinizes.

Man's capacity to acknowledge the finiteness of his existence, and to act in accordance with this painful discovery, may well be his greatest psychological achievement, despite the fact that it can often be demonstrated that a manifest acceptance of transience may go hand in hand with covert denials.

The acceptance of transience is accomplished by the ego, which performs the emotional work that precedes, accompanies, and follows separations. Without these efforts a valid conception of time, of limits, and of the impermanence of object cathexes could not be achieved. Freud discussed the emotional task which is imposed on the psyche by the impermanence of objects, be they beloved people or cherished values, and gave expression to the conviction that their impermanence did not detract from their worth. On the contrary, he said, their very impermanence makes us love and admire them even more: "Transience value is scarcity value in time."

Freud's attitude is based on the relinquishment of emotional infantilism, an abandonment even of a trace of the narcissistic insistence on the omnipotence of the wish; it expresses the acceptance of realistic values. More difficult still, however, than the acknowledgment of the impermanence of object cathexes is the unqualified intellectual and emotional acceptance of the fact that we ourselves are impermanent, that the self which is cathected with narcissistic libido is finite in time. I believe that this rare feat rests not simply on a victory of autonomous reason and supreme objectivity over the claims of narcissism but on the creation of a higher form of narcissism. The great who have achieved the outlook on life to which the Romans referred as living *sub specie aeternitatis* do not display resignation and hopelessness but a quiet pride which is often coupled with mild disdain of the rabble which, without being able to delight in the variety of experiences which life has to offer, is yet afraid of death and trembles at its approach. Goethe gave beautiful expression of his contempt for those who cannot accept death as an intrinsic part of life in the following stanza:

*Und so lang du das nicht hast,
Dieses: Stirb und werde!*

*Bist du nur ein trüber Gast
Auf der dunklen Erde.*¹⁷

Only through an acceptance of death, Goethe says here, can man reap all that is in life; without it, however, life is dim and insignificant. I do not believe that an attitude such as the one expressed by Goethe is to be understood as a beautiful denial of the fear of death. There is no undertone of anxiety in it and no excitement. Conspicuous in it, however, is a non-isolated, creative superiority which judges and admonishes with quiet assurance. I have little doubt that those who are able to achieve this ultimate attitude toward life do so on the strength of a new, expanded, transformed narcissism: a cosmic narcissism which has transcended the bounds of the individual.

*And till thine this deep behest:
Die to win thy being!
Art thou but a dreary guest
Upon earth unseeing*

Just as the child's primary empathy with the mother is the precursor of the adult's ability to be empathic, so his primary identity with her must be considered as the precursor of an expansion of the self, late in life, when the finiteness of individual existence is acknowledged. The original psychological universe, i.e., the primordial experience of the mother, is "remembered" by many people in the form of the occasionally occurring vague reverberations which are known by the term "oceanic feeling." The achievement—as the certainty of eventual death is fully realized—of a shift of the narcissistic cathexes, from the self to a concept of participation in a supra-individual and timeless existence, must also be regarded as genetically predetermined by the child's primary identity with the mother. In contrast to the oceanic feeling, however, which is experienced passively (and usually fleetingly), the genuine shift of the cathexes toward a cosmic narcissism is the enduring, creative result of the steadfast activities of an autonomous ego, and only very few are able to attain it.

It seems a long way from the acceptance of transience and the quasi-religious solemnity of a cosmic narcissism to another uniquely human acquisition: the capacity for humor. And yet, the two

¹⁷ Adapted from a translation by Ludwig Lewisohn.

phenomena have much in common. It is not by accident that Freud introduces his essay on humor with a man's ability to overcome the fear of his impending death by putting himself, through humor, upon a higher plane. "When ... a criminal who was being led out to the gallows on a Monday remarked: 'Well, the week's beginning nicely,'" Freud says that "the humorous process ... affords him ... satisfaction." And Freud states that "humour has something liberating about it"; that it "has something of grandeur"; and that it is a "triumph of narcissism" and "the victorious assertion of ... invulnerability" (p. 162). Metapsychologically, however, Freud explains that humor—this "triumph of narcissism"—is achieved by a person's withdrawing "the psychical accent from his ego" and "transposing it on to his super-ego" (p. 164).

Humor and cosmic narcissism are thus both transformations of narcissism which aid man in achieving ultimate mastery over the demands of the narcissistic self, i.e., to tolerate the recognition of his finiteness in principle and even of his impending end.

There is no doubt that the claim that the ego has mastered its fear of death is often not authentic. If a person is unable to be serious and employs humor excessively, or if he is unwilling to face the pains and labors of everyday living and moves along continuously with his head in the clouds, we will become suspicious of both the clown and the saint, and we will most likely be right in surmising that neither the humor nor the otherworldliness are genuine. Yet, if a man is capable of responding with humor to the recognition of those unalterable realities which oppose the assertions of the narcissistic self, and if he can truly attain that quiet, superior stance which enables him to contemplate his own end philosophically, we will assume that a transformation of his narcissism has indeed taken place (a withdrawal of the psychical accent from the "ego," as Freud put it) and will respect the person who has achieved it.

A disregard for the interests of the self, even to the point of allowing its death, may also come about during states of supreme object cathexis. Such instances (for example, as a consequence of an upsurge of extreme, personified patriotic fervor) take place in a frenzied mental condition, and the ego is paralyzed, as if in a trance. Humor and cosmic narcissism, on the other hand, which permit us to face death without having to resort to denial, are metapsychologically based not on a decathexis of the self through a frantic hypercathexis of objects but on a decathexis of the narcissistic self through a

rearrangement and transformation of the narcissistic libido; and, in contrast to states of extreme object cathexis, the span of the ego is here not narrowed but the ego remains active and deliberate.

A genuine decathexis of the self can only be achieved slowly by an intact, well-functioning ego; and it is

accompanied by sadness as the cathexis is transferred from the cherished self upon the supraindividual ideals and upon the world with which one identifies. The profoundest forms of humor and cosmic narcissism therefore do not present a picture of grandiosity and elation but that of a quiet inner triumph with an admixture of undenied melancholy.

We have now reached our final subject matter, the human attitude which we call wisdom. In the progression from information through knowledge to wisdom, the first two can still be defined almost exclusively within the sphere of cognition itself. The term information refers to the gleaning of isolated data about the world; knowledge to the comprehension of a cohesive set of such data held together by a matrix of abstractions. Wisdom, however, goes beyond the cognitive sphere, although, of course, it includes it.

Wisdom is achieved largely through man's ability to overcome his unmodified narcissism and it rests on his acceptance of the limitations of his physical, intellectual, and emotional powers. It may be defined as an amalgamation of the higher processes of cognition with the psychological attitude which accompanies the renouncement of these narcissistic demands. Neither the possession of ideals, nor the capacity for humor, nor the acceptance of transience alone characterizes wisdom. All three have to be linked together to form a new psychological constellation which goes beyond the several emotional and cognitive attributes of which it is made up. Wisdom may thus be defined as a stable attitude of the personality toward life and the world, an attitude which is formed through the integration of the cognitive function with humor, acceptance of transience, and a firmly cathected system of values.

In the course of life the acquisition of knowledge clearly must be preceded by the gathering of information. Even from the point of view of its cognitive component, therefore, wisdom can hardly be an attribute of youth since experience and work must first have led to the acquisition of broadly based knowledge. Ideals are most strongly cathected in youth; humor is usually at its height during maturity;

and an acceptance of transience may be achieved during the advanced years. Thus we can see again that the attainment of wisdom is usually reserved for the later phases of life.

The essence of this proud achievement is therefore a maximal relinquishment of narcissistic delusions, including the acceptance of the inevitability of death, without an abandonment of cognitive and emotional involvements. The ultimate act of cognition, i.e., the acknowledgment of the limits and of the finiteness of the self, is not the result of an isolated intellectual process but is the victorious outcome of the lifework of the total personality in acquiring broadly based knowledge and in transforming archaic modes of narcissism into ideals, humor, and a sense of supraindividual participation in the world.

Sarcasm occurs in consequence of the lack of idealized values and attempts to minimize the emotional significance of narcissistic limitations through the hypercathexis of a pleasure-seeking, omnipotent self. The most important precondition for the feat of humor under adverse circumstances, however, and for the ability to contemplate one's impending end, is the formation and maintenance of a set of cherished values, i.e., metapsychologically, a strong idealization of the superego. Wisdom is, in addition, characterized not only by the maintenance of the libidinal cathexes of the old ideals but by their creative expansion. And in contrast to an attitude of utter seriousness and unrelieved solemnity vis-à-vis the approaching end of life, the truly wise are able in the end to transform the humor of their years of maturity into a sense of proportion, a touch of irony toward the achievements of individual existence, including even their own wisdom. The ego's ultimate mastery over the narcissistic self, the final control of the rider over the horse, may after all have been decisively assisted by the fact that the horse, too, has grown old. And, lastly, we may recognize that what has been accomplished is not so much control but the acceptance of the ultimate insight that, as concerns the supreme powers of nature, we are all "sunday riders."¹⁸

In concluding this presentation let me now give a brief résumé of the principal themes which I laid before you. I wanted to emphasize that there are various forms of narcissism which must be considered not only as forerunners of object love but also as independent psychological constellations, whose

¹⁸ The German word "*Sonntagsreiter*" in the well-known joke mentioned by Freud has been rendered as "sunday horseman" in the English translations.

development and functions deserve separate examination and evaluation. In addition, I tried to demonstrate the ways by which a number of complex and autonomous achievements of the mature personality were derived from transformations of narcissism, i.e., created by the ego's capacity to tame narcissistic cathexes and to employ them for its highest aims.

I would finally like to say that I have become increasingly convinced of the value of these conceptualizations for psychoanalytic therapy. They are useful in the formulation of broad aspects of the psychopathology of the frequently encountered narcissistic personality types among our patients; they help us understand the psychological changes which tend to be induced in them; and, last but not least, they assist us in the evaluation of the therapeutic goal. In many instances, the reshaping of the narcissistic structures and their integration into the personality—the strengthening of ideals, and the achievement, even to a modest degree, of such wholesome transformations of narcissism as humor, creativity, empathy, and wisdom—must be rated as a more genuine and valid result of therapy than the patient's precarious compliance with demands for a change of his narcissism into object love.

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