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*Thoughts on Narcissism &  
Narcissistic Rage*

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# Thoughts on Narcissism & Narcissistic Rage



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## Note

This essay was presented in an abbreviated version as the A. A. Brill Lecture of the New York Psychoanalytic Society on November 30, 1971. Support by the Anne Pollock Lederer Research Fund of the Institute for Psychoanalysis of the long-term study of narcissism is gratefully acknowledged. Specifically, this essay sets forth the principal lines of thought to be pursued in a detailed investigation of certain aspects of narcissism which is intended to be a continuation of the already published work on the vicissitudes of the libidinal cathexis of the self (Kohut, 1971). The future work will deal with the following three topics: (1) the libidinal aspects of narcissism—retrospective and supplementary considerations; (2) narcissism and aggression; and (3) narcissism and group psychology. The present essay deals in a preliminary form with the first two of these three topics; the scope of the third topic is briefly outlined at the end.

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# Thoughts On Narcissism and Narcissistic Rage

## Introduction

One of the gems of German literature is an essay called “On the Puppet Theater” by the dramatist Heinrich von Kleist (1777–1810), written in 1811, not long before he ended his short life by suicide. Kleist and his work are almost unknown outside the circle of the German language, but my fascination with his short essay—and with another one of his stories—has, as I can see in retrospect, a specific significance in my own intellectual development: it marks the first time that I felt drawn to the topic that has now absorbed my scientific interest for several years.

Ever since I read Kleist’s story during my school days I had puzzled about the mysterious impact which the plain account has on the reader. A male ballet dancer, we are told, asserts in a fictitious conversation with the author that, by comparison with human dancing, the dance of puppets is near-perfect. The puppet’s center of gravity is its soul; the puppeteer needs only to think himself into this point as he is moving the puppet, and the movements of its limbs will attain a degree of perfection

that cannot be reached by the human dancer. Since puppets are not bound down by gravity, and since their physical center and soul are one, they are never artificial or pretentious. The human dancer, by comparison, is self-conscious, pretentious, artificial. The author responds to the dancer by recalling how, some years ago, he had admired the grace with which his nude male companion had set his foot upon a stool. Mischievously he had asked him to repeat the motion. He blushed and tried—but became self-conscious and clumsy. “... beginning at this moment,” Kleist writes, “a puzzling change took hold of the young man. He began to stand in front of the mirror for days; ... [An] incomprehensible force appeared to engage ... the play of the motility which formerly had so freely expressed his emotions” (my tr.).

It is not my intention to bring our psychoanalytic knowledge to bear on this story. But the psychoanalytic reader will have no difficulty identifying the problems with which the writer of the story was preoccupied. Apprehensions about the aliveness of self and body, and the repudiation of these fears by the assertion that the inanimate can yet be graceful, even perfect. The topics of homosexuality (see Sadger, 1909); of poise and of exhibitionism; of blushing and self-consciousness are alluded to; and so is the theme of grandiosity in the fantasy of flying—the notion of “antigravity”—and that of merger with an omnipotent environment by which one is controlled—the puppeteer. Finally, there is the description of a profound change in a young man, ushered in by the ominous symptom of gazing at himself for days in the mirror.

Of all the facets of narcissism, only one is missing in Kleist's essay: aggression as it arises from the matrix of narcissistic imbalance. It is a striking manifestation of the unity of the

creative forces in the depth of the personality of a great writer that Kleist had indeed dealt with this theme a year or two earlier, in the story of Michael Kohlhaas(1808), a gripping description of the insatiable search for revenge after a narcissistic injury—in its field, I believe, surpassed by one work only, Melville's great *Moby Dick*. Kleist's story relates the fate of a man who, like Captain Ahab, is in the grip of interminable narcissistic rage. It is the greatest rendition of the revenge motif in German literature, a theme which plays an important role in the national destiny of the German nation whose thirst for revenge after the defeat of 1918 came near to destroying all of Western civilization.

In recent years I have investigated some phenomena related to the self, its cohesion and its fragmentation (Kohut, 1966), (1968), (1970), (1971). Within my limits I have brought this work to a conclusion. The present essay gives me the opportunity to turn from the former topic to the relationship between narcissism and aggression. Still, I shall first deal once more with the work that lies behind, draw attention to topics which are in need of emphasis, and point up areas that will provide a basis for the subsequent formulations.

## The Self and Its Libidinal Investment

## The Influence of Parental Attitudes on the Formation of the Self

If I were asked what I consider to be the most important point to be stressed about narcissism I would answer: its independent line of development, from the primitive to the most mature, adaptive, and culturally valuable. This development has important innate determinants, but the specific interplay between the child and his environment which furthers, or hinders, the cohesion of the self and the formation of idealized psychic structures is well worth further detailed examination, especially with the aid of the study of the varieties of the narcissistic transferences. In this essay I shall add only one small point to the results which I have previously reported, namely, that the side-by-side existence of separate developmental lines in the narcissistic and in the object instinctual realms in the child is intertwined with the parents' attitude toward the child, i.e., that they relate at times to the child in empathic narcissistic merger and look upon the psychic organization of the child as part of their own, while at other times they respond to the child as to an independent center of his own initiative, i.e., they invest him with object libido.

## On the Acceptance of an Affirmative Attitude toward Narcissism in Theory and Practice

My second retrospective point refers to a broad question. In assuming an independent line of development in the narcissistic sector of the personality, a development that leads to the acquisition of mature, adaptive, and culturally valuable attributes in the narcissistic realm, I have, of course, taken an in essence affirmative attitude toward narcissism. But while I have become convinced of the appropriateness of this affirmative outlook on narcissism, I am also aware of the fact that it may be questioned, that indeed there exist a number of arguments which can be marshaled in opposition to a consideration of narcissism as an integral, self-contained set of psychic functions rather than as a regression product; that there exist a number of obstacles which stand in the way of its acceptance as potentially adaptive and valuable rather than as necessarily ill or evil.

One aspect of classical theory (see especially Freud, 1914b), (1915), (1917a)—and the in general appropriate conservatism of analysts concerning changes in theory—may, adventitiously, play a role in this regard. We are used to thinking of the relationship between narcissism and object love in a way which corresponds to the image of the fluid levels in a U-shaped tube. If the level of fluid in one end rises, it sinks in the other. There is no love where there is toothache; there is no pain where there is passionate love. Such thought models, however, should be replaced when they cannot accommodate the data of observation. The sense of heightened self-esteem, for example, which accompanies object love demonstrates a relationship between the two forms of libidinal cathexis which does not correspond to that of the oscillations in a U-tube

system. And while the behavior of the fluid levels in the U-tube, and Freud's amoeba simile (1914bp. 75), are models which adequately illustrate the total preoccupation of the sufferer with his aching tooth and the waiting lover's obliviousness to rain and cold, these phenomena can be readily explained in terms of the distribution of attention cathexes and do not require the U-tube theory.

Be that as it may, more formidable than the scientific context, in which the term narcissism may have acquired a slightly pejorative connotation as a product of regression or defense, is a specific emotional climate which is unfavorable to the acceptance of narcissism as a healthy and approvable psychological constellation. The deeply ingrained value system of the Occident (pervading the religion, the philosophy, the social utopias of Western man) extols altruism and concern for others and disparages egotism and concern for one's self. Yet, just as is true with man's sexual desires, so also with his narcissistic needs: neither a contemptuous attitude toward the powerful psychological forces which assert themselves in these two dimensions of human life nor the attempt at their total eradication will lead to genuine progress in man's self-control or social adaptation. Christianity, while leaving open narcissistic fulfillment in the realm of the merger with the omnipotent self-object, the divine figure of Christ, attempts to curb the manifestations of the grandiose self. The current materialistic rationalism in Western culture, on the other hand, while giving greater freedom to the enhancement of the self, tends to belittle, or (e.g., in the sphere where a militant atheism holds sway) to forbid, the traditional forms of institutionalized relatedness to the idealized object.

In response to ostracism and suppression the aspirations

of the grandiose self may indeed seem to subside, and the yearning for a merger with the idealized self-object will be denied. The suppressed but unmodified narcissistic structures, however, become intensified as their expression is blocked; they will break through the brittle controls and will suddenly bring about, not only in individuals but also in whole groups, the unrestrained pursuit of grandiose aims and the resistance less merger with omnipotent self-objects. I need only refer to the ruthlessly pursued ambitions of Nazi Germany, and of the German population's total surrender to the will of the Führer, to exemplify my meaning.

During quiescent historical periods the attitude in certain layers of society toward narcissism resembles Victorian hypocrisy toward sex. Officially the existence of the social manifestations emanating from the grandiose self and the omnipotent self-object are denied, yet their split-off dominance everywhere is obvious. I think that the overcoming of a hypocritical attitude toward narcissism is as much required today as was the overcoming of sexual hypocrisy a hundred years ago. We should not deny our ambitions, our wish to dominate, our wish to shine, and our yearning to merge into omnipotent figures, but should instead learn to acknowledge the legitimacy of these narcissistic forces as we have learned to acknowledge the legitimacy of our object-instinctual strivings. We shall then be able, as can be observed in the systematic therapeutic analysis of narcissistic personality disturbances, to transform our archaic grandiosity and exhibitionism into realistic self-esteem and into pleasure with ourselves, and our yearning to be at one with the omnipotent self-object into the socially useful, adaptive, and joyful capacity to be enthusiastic and to admire the great after whose lives, deeds, and personalities we can permit

ourselves to model our own.

## Ego Autonomy and Ego Dominance

It is in the context of assessing the value of the transformation (rather than of the suppression) of the archaic narcissistic structures for man as an active participant in human affairs—*l'homme engagé*—that I would like to mention a conceptual distinction which I have found useful, namely, the demarcation of ego dominance from ego autonomy (see Kohut, 1971p. 187). There is a place for ego autonomy: the rider of the horse; man as he reflects, coolly and dispassionately, in particular as he scrutinizes the data of his observations. But there is also a place for ego dominance: the rider on the horse; man as he responds to the forces within himself; as he shapes his goals and forms his major reactions to the environment; man as an effective participant on the stage of history. In the narcissistic realm, in particular, ego dominance increases our ability to react with the full spectrum of our emotions: with disappointment and rage, or with feelings of triumph; controlledly, but not necessarily restrainedly.



## A Comparison of the Genetic and Dynamic Importance of Narcissistic and Object-Instinctual Factors

In my retrospective survey I shall now take up the question whether by focusing our attention on narcissism we may not run the risk of disregarding the object-instinctual forces in the psychic life of man. We must ask ourselves in particular whether our emphasis on the genetic and dynamic importance of the vicissitudes of the formation and cohesion of the self may not lead to a deemphasis of the crucial genetic and dynamic role played in normal and abnormal development by the specific object-instinctual investments of the oedipus complex.

A short while ago a younger colleague whom I might consider to be a pupil and who, at any rate, has followed my work on narcissism with interest, reviewed the relationship between the generations in our field and, speaking for the rising generation of analysts, suggested that the anxiety of the older group was not so much “that we become grownup, but that we become different” (Terman, 1972). I thought that the clear implication of this incisive statement was that the older generation was concerned less about being endangered by the oedipal killing wish than about being deprived in the narcissistic realm—and I felt strongly inclined to agree with this opinion. But then I began to worry. Am I the Pied Piper who leads the young away from the solid ground of the object-libidinal aspects of the oedipus complex? Are preoedipal and narcissistic factors perhaps no more than precursors and trimming? And will the preoccupation with them become a focus for the old resistances against the full acceptance of the emotional reality of the passions of the oedipal drama? Does not lie behind the preconscious fear that

the younger generation will be “different” the deeper and more powerful fear of their killing wish for which the narcissistic concern is only cover and disguise?

I shall not attempt to pursue this question directly. I assume that it is not going to be answered in the form in which we see it now, but that it will someday be superseded by a reformulation of the nexus of causal factors in early life. (The work of Gedo and Goldberg [1972], for example, constitutes, I believe, a significant step in this direction.) In the meantime, however, we must, without prejudice, study all analytic data—oedipal and preoedipal, object-instinctual and narcissistic—and determine their developmental and genetic significance.

We shall therefore do well to refrain from setting up a choice between theoretical opposites concerning the question of the genetic importance of the young child’s experiences in the narcissistic and in the object-instinctual realm. The examination of two topics will, however, illuminate the relative influence which these two sets of early experiences exert in later childhood and in adult life. The first topic concerns the significance of the pivotal developmental phase in which the nucleus of a cohesive self crystallizes; the second concerns the interplay between pathology of the self (narcissistic pathology) and pathology of structural conflict (oedipal pathology).

## The Prototypical Significance of the Period of the Formation of the Self

Concerning the first of these two topics it must be stressed that, similar to the persisting influence of the vicissitudes of the oedipus complex, the vicissitudes of the early formation of the self determine the form and the course of later psychological events which are analogous to the crucial early phase. Just as the period of pubertal drive increase, for example, or the time when a marriage partner is chosen, constitute emotional situations in which a dormant oedipus complex is prone to be reactivated, so do certain periods of transition which demand from us a reshuffling of the self, its change and its rebuilding, constitute emotional situations which reactivate the period of the formation of the self. The replacement of one long-term self representation by another endangers a self whose earlier, nuclear establishment was faulty; and the specific vicissitudes of the early pathology are experienced as specifically repeated by the new situation. Extensive changes of the self must, for example, be achieved in the transition from early childhood to latency, from latency to puberty, and from adolescence to young adulthood. But these sociobiologically prescheduled developmental processes are not the only ones which impose a drastic change of our self on us; we must also consider external shifts: such as moves from one culture to another; from private life into the army; from the small town to the big city; and the modification in the self which is necessitated when a person's social role is taking a turn—whether for better or worse, e.g., sudden financial success or sudden loss of fortune.

The psychopathological events of late adolescence described by Erikson (1956)—I would call them the vicissitudes of self-

cohesion in the transitional period between adolescence and adulthood—should therefore neither be considered as occupying a uniquely significant developmental position, nor should they be explained primarily as due to the demands of this particular period. (These stresses constitute only the precipitating external circumstances.) But an adolescent's crumbling self experience should in each individual instance be investigated in depth—no less than in those equally frequent and important cases of self fragmentation which occur during other periods of transition which have overtaxed the solidity and resilience of the nucleus of the self. Why did the self break down in this specific adolescent? What is the specific mode of its fragmentation? In what specific form is the task of the construction of a new self—the self of young adulthood—experienced? How, specifically, does the present situation repeat the early one? What traumatic interplay between parent and child (when the child began to construct a grandiose-exhibitionistic self and an omnipotent self-object) is now being repeated for the patient, and—most importantly!—how is it revived in one of the specific forms of the narcissistic transference?

To repeat: just as the object-instinctual experiences of the oedipal period become the prototype of our later object-instinctual involvements and form the basis for our specific weaknesses and strengths in this area, so do the experiences during the period of the formation of the self become the prototype of the specific forms of our later vulnerability and security in the narcissistic realm: of the ups and downs in our self-esteem; of our lesser or greater need for praise, for merger into idealized figures, and for other forms of narcissistic sustenance; and of the greater or lesser cohesion of our self during periods of transition, whether in the transition to latency,

in early or late adolescence, in maturity, or in old age.<sup>1</sup>

## Pseudonarcissistic Disorders and Pseudotransference Neuroses

The relationship between the focus of the development of the object-instinctual strivings, the oedipus complex, and the focus of the development in the narcissistic realm, the phase of the formation of the self, will be further illuminated by comparing two paradigmatic forms of psychopathology: nuclear oedipal psychopathology which is hidden by a broad cover of narcissistic disturbance; and narcissistic disorders which are hidden by seemingly oedipal symptomatology.

Concerning the first a brief remark will suffice. Every analyst has seen the gradual emergence of the oedipal passions and anxieties from behind a broad cover of narcissistic vulnerabilities and complaints, and knows that the careful observation of the oedipal transference will also reveal how the narcissistic manifestations are related to the central oedipal experiences. How, for example, a sense of low self-esteem relates to phallic comparisons and a feeling of castration, how cycles of triumphant self-confidence and depression relate to fantasies of oedipal success and the discovery of being in fact excluded from the primal scene, and the like. Surely, I need not elaborate here.

Now to the second form of paradigmatic psychopathology. I have chosen to focus on a specific, somewhat complex type of narcissistic disorder despite its comparative infrequency because its examination is very instructive. (Cases, it may be added, in which the narcissistic blows suffered by the child in the oedipal phase lead to the first straight-forward breakdown of the self are much more common.) I believe that, among

the in principle analyzable disorders, it confronts the analyst with one of his most trying and difficult therapeutic tasks. These patients initially create the impression of a classical neurosis. When their apparent psychopathology, however, is approached by interpretations, the immediate result is near-catastrophic: they act out wildly, overwhelm the analyst with oedipal love demands, threaten suicide—in short, although the content (of symptoms, fantasies, and manifest transference) is all triangular oedipal, the very openness of their infantile wishes, the lack of resistances to their being uncovered, is not in tune with the initial impression.

That the oedipal symptomatology in such cases (e.g., of “pseudohysteria”) is not genuine is generally accepted. In contrast to what I believe to be the prevailing view, however, that we are dealing with hidden psychosis or with personalities whose psychic equilibrium is threatened by severe ego weakness, I have become convinced that many of these patients suffer from a narcissistic personality disturbance, will establish one of the forms of narcissistic transference, and are thus treatable by psychoanalysis.<sup>2</sup>

The nuclear psychopathology of these individuals concerns the self. Being threatened in the maintenance of a cohesive self because in early life they were lacking in adequate confirming responses (“mirroring”) from the environment, they turned to self-stimulation in order to retain the precarious cohesion of their experiencing and acting self. The oedipal phase, including its conflicts and anxieties, became paradoxically a remedial stimulant, its very intensity being used by the psyche to counteract the tendency toward the breakup of the self—just as a small child may attempt to use self-inflicted pain (head banging, for example) in order to retain a sense of aliveness and cohesion.

Patients whose manifest psychopathology serves this defensive function will react to the analyst's interpretations concerning the object-instinctual aspects of their behavior with the fear of losing the stimulation which prevents their fragmentation; and they will respond with an intensification of oedipal dramatizing so long as the analyst does not address himself to the defect of the self. It is only when a shift in the focus of the analyst's interpretations indicates that he is now in empathic closeness to the patient's fragmenting self, that the stimulation of the self through forced oedipal experiences (dramatizing in the analytic situation; acting out) begins to diminish.

It might bear repeating at this point what I have, of course, already said in earlier contributions: that the only reliable way by which the differential diagnosis between a narcissistic personality disturbance and a classical transference neurosis can be established clinically is the observation of the transference which emerges spontaneously in the analytic situation. In the classical transference neurosis the vicissitudes of the triangular oedipal situation will gradually unfold. If we are dealing with a narcissistic personality disturbance, however, then we will witness the emergence of one of the forms of narcissistic transference, i.e., of a transference in which the vicissitudes of the cohesion and (fleeting and reversible) fragmentation of the self are correlated to the vicissitudes of the patient's relationship to the analyst.

If we wish to state the differentiation between classical transference neurosis and narcissistic personality disturbance in metapsychological terms, then we must focus on the structure of the psychopathology. Concerning the two aforementioned contrasting paradigmatic disorders, for example, we can say the following. In the pseudo-hysterias, on the one hand, we

are dealing with patients who are attempting to maintain the cohesion of an endangered self through the stimulation which they derive from the hyper-cathected oedipal strivings. An overt oedipal symptomatology is used to keep a hidden self pathology within bounds. In the pseudo-narcissistic disorders, on the other hand, we are dealing with patients who are attempting to come to terms not only with the object-instinctual conflicts, wishes, and emotions of the oedipal period, but also—a point which deserves emphasis—with the narcissistic injuries to which their securely established self had been exposed within the context of the oedipal experience. The presence, in other words, of narcissistic features—and even their initial predominance within the total clinical picture—does not alter the fact that the essential psychopathology is a classical psychoneurosis.

## Organ Inferiority and Shame

My comments up to this point may be regarded as my attempt to tidy up the house before going on a trip. The house is the work on the libidinal aspects of narcissism—work which is already done but where I wish to straighten out odds and ends before I can leave it. The trip should lead into the rugged terrain of narcissistic rage and, later, into the far-off region of group psychology. A final glance, however, at a topic which lies in the main within the familiar area of the libidinal cathexis of the self, yet which extends into the unfamiliar territory of narcissism and aggression, should, by virtue of its transitional position, provide confidence for the new undertaking. Let me refer to this topic by a nowadays somewhat discredited name<sup>3</sup> as “organ inferiority” (Adler, 1907).

In his *New Introductory Lectures* (1933p. 66) Freud took the



writer Emil Ludwig to task (without naming him, however); Ludwig had, in one of the biographical novels (1926) which were his specialty, interpreted the personality of Emperor Wilhelm II in accordance with the theories of Alfred Adler. In particular he had explained the Hohenzollern's readiness to take offense and to turn toward war as reactions to the sense of a specific organ inferiority. The Emperor had been born with a withered arm. The defective limb became the sore which remained sensitive throughout his life and brought about the specific character formation which, according to Ludwig, was one of the important factors which led to the outbreak of the First World War.

Not so!, said Freud. It was not the birth injury in itself which resulted in Emperor Wilhelm's sensitivity to narcissistic slights, but the rejection by his proud mother who could not tolerate an imperfect child.

It takes little effort to add the appropriate psychodynamic refinements to Freud's genetic formulation. A mother's lack of confirming and approving "mirroring" responses to her child prevents the transformation of the archaic narcissistic cathexis of the child's body-self which normally is achieved with the aid of the increasing selectivity of the mother's admiration and approval. The crude and intense narcissistic cathexis of the grandiose body-self (in Emperor Wilhelm's case: the withered arm) remains thus unaltered and its archaic grandiosity and exhibitionism cannot be integrated with the remainder of the psychic organization which gradually reaches maturity. The archaic grandiosity and exhibitionism then become split off from the reality ego ("vertical split" in the psyche) or separated from it through repression ("horizontal split"). Deprived of the mediating function of the reality ego, they are, therefore, no longer modifiable by later external influences, be they ever

so accepting or approving, i.e., there is no possibility for a “corrective emotional experience” (Alexander et al., 1946). On the other hand, the archaic grandiose-exhibitionistic (body-)self will from time to time assert its archaic claims, either by by-passing the repression barrier via the vertically split-off sector of the psyche or by breaking through the brittle defenses of the central sector. It will suddenly flood the reality ego with unneutralized exhibitionistic cathexes and overwhelm the neutralizing powers of the ego, which becomes paralyzed and experiences intense shame and rage.

I do not know enough about the personality of Emperor Wilhelm to judge whether the foregoing formulation does indeed apply to him. I believe, however, that I am on more solid ground when I suspect that Emil Ludwig did not take kindly to Freud’s criticism. At any rate he later wrote a biography of Freud (Ludwig, 1947) which was the undisguised expression of narcissistic rage—so coarse<sup>4</sup> in fact that even those inimical to psychoanalysis and Freud considered the crudity of Ludwig’s attack an embarrassment and disassociated themselves from it.

Be this as it may with regard to Emperor Wilhelm and his biographer, I have no doubt that the ubiquitous sensitivity about bodily defects and shortcomings can be effortlessly explained within the meta-psychological framework of the vicissitudes of the libidinal cathexes of the grandiose self and, in particular, of the grandiose-exhibitionistic body-self.

The specific topic of the sense of inferiority of children about the small size of their genitals (in the boy in comparison with the penis of the adult man; in the girl in comparison with the boy’s organ) may, however, warrant a few special remarks. The sensitivity of children about their genitals is at its peak during the pivotal phallic phase of psychosexual

development—later sensitivities concerning the genitals must be understood as residuals (e.g., during latency) or as revivals (e.g., during puberty) of the exhibitionism of the phallic phase. The significance of the genitals during the phallic phase is determined by the fact that at this period they temporarily constitute the leading zone of the child's (bodily) narcissism—they are not only the instruments of intense (fantasied) object-libidinal interactions, they also carry enormous narcissistic cathexes. (The narcissistic cathexis of feces during the anal phase of development and the narcissistic cathexis of certain autonomous ego functions during latency are examples of earlier and later leading zones of the child's narcissism during preceding and subsequent stages of his development.) The genitals are thus the focal point of the child's narcissistic aspirations and sensitivities during the phallic phase. If we keep these facts in mind and emphasize in addition that the exhibitionistic component of infantile narcissism is largely unneutralized, then we will also understand the much-disputed significance of infantile penis envy. This topic has aroused a great deal of unscientific and acrimonious discussion, leading even to the ludicrous spectacle of opposing scientific lineups of men who assign the phenomenon exclusively to women, and of women who either deny its existence or its importance.

Some of the difficulties may resolve themselves if the intensity of the exhibitionistic cathexes is taken into account, and if we, in particular, do not underestimate the importance of the visible genital in this context: in other words, if we keep in mind that the narcissistic demands of the phallic period are no more—but also no less!—than an important special instance in the developmental series of demands for immediate mirroring responses to concretely exhibited aspects of the

child's body or of his physical or mental functions. That his penis will grow, is small consolation for the little boy; and that a complex but invisible apparatus will be maturing which will enable her to bear children, is small consolation for the little girl within the framework of the psychology of childhood exhibitionism—notwithstanding the simultaneous existence of other sources of direct narcissistic gratification and of acceptable substitutive mirroring which enhances the acquisition of sublimations in children of both sexes.

The shame of the adult, too, when a defective body part is looked at by others—indeed his conviction that others are staring at it!<sup>5</sup> —is due to the pressure of the unmodified, archaic, exhibitionistic libido with which the defective organ has remained cathected. And the self-consciousness concerning the defective organ and the tendency to blush when it is being scrutinized by others are the psychological and psychophysiological correlates of the breakthrough of the unmodified exhibitionistic cathexes. (I shall return to this topic in the context of the metapsychology of narcissistic rage.)

## The Motivational Role of Disturbed Narcissism in Certain Types of Self-Mutilation and Suicide

Related to the preceding formulations about “organ inferiority” are those which concern the self-mutilation of the psychotic and certain types of suicide. With regard to both self-mutilations and suicide one must differentiate between the motive for these acts and the ability to perform them.

The motivation for the self-mutilations of psychotics emanates, I believe, in many instances not from specific conflicts—such as incest guilt leading to the self-punitive removal

of an organ which symbolizes the evil penis. It is rather due to the fact that a breakup of the body-self has occurred and that the fragments of the body-self which cannot be retained within the total organization of the body-self become an unbearably painful burden and are therefore removed. The schizophrenic who (like the young man in Kleist's essay on the puppet theater) looks into the mirror for hours and days attempts to unite his fragmenting body-self with the aid of his gaze. If these and similar endeavors (e.g., stimulation of the total body-self through forced physical activity) to replace the cohesion-producing narcissistic cathexes fail, then the organ is removed.

The understanding, however, of the motivation for self-mutilation is not, by itself, sufficient to explain the actual performance of such acts. A person may sense in himself the analogue of the Biblical command, "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out" (Matthew 18:9), but he would still be unable to obey this order. The ability to perform an act of gross self-mutilation depends, in some instances at least, on the fact that the organ which the psychotic removes has lost its narcissistic libidinal cathexis; i.e., it is not anymore part of the self and can therefore be discarded as if it were a foreign body. This explanation applies specifically in those instances in which the act of self-mutilation is performed calmly by the psychotic patient. Self-mutilations performed during stages of emotional frenzy may have different motivations, and the ability to carry them out rests on the near-total concentration of the psychotic's attention on some delusional aim. The ability to carry out the act then does not rest on the fragmentation of the body-self, but is based on a scotoma of the psychotic's perception—similar to those instances when soldiers during a frenzied attack on enemy lines may temporarily not be aware of the fact that they have suffered

a severe physical injury.

Analogous considerations also apply to certain kinds of suicide with regard to both the motivation that leads to the act and the ability to carry it out. Such suicides are in the main based on the loss of the libidinal cathexis of the self. Analogous to certain self-mutilations, such a suicide does not emanate from specific structural conflicts—it does not constitute, for example, a step undertaken in order to expiate oedipal guilt. Characteristically, these suicides are preceded, not by guilt feelings, but by feelings of unbearable emptiness and deadness or by intense shame, i.e., by the signs of profound disturbance in the realm of the libidinal cathexis of the self.

## Narcissism and Aggression

The hypothesis that a tendency to kill is deeply rooted in man's psychobiological makeup and stems from his animal past—the assumption, in other words, of man's inherent propensity toward aggression (and the correlated conceptualization of aggression as a drive) protects us against the lure of the comforting illusion that human pugnacity could be easily abolished if only our material needs were satisfied. But these broad formulations contribute little to the understanding of aggression as a psychological phenomenon. It is obviously not enough to say that such phenomena as warfare, intolerance, and persecution are due to man's regression toward the undisguised expression of a drive. And the often-heard complaint that it is the thinness of the civilized layer of the human personality which is responsible for the evils wrought by human aggression is appealing in its simplicity but misses the mark.

True, the protagonists of the most dreadful manifestation

of aggression in the history of modern Western civilization proclaimed loudly that their destructive acts were performed in the service of a law of nature. The Nazis justified their warfare and the extermination of those whom they considered weak and inferior by seeing their misdeeds within the framework of a vulgarized Darwinism: the inherent right of the stronger; and the survival of the fittest race for the good of mankind. But despite their own theories, I do not believe that we can come closer to the understanding of the Nazi phenomenon by conceiving of it as a regression toward the biologically simple, toward animal behavior—whether such a regression be extolled, as it was by the Nazis themselves, or condemned and despised, as it was ultimately by the rest of the world.

It would on the whole be pleasant if we could do so; if we could state—in a simplistic application of a Civilization-and-Its-Discontents principle—that Hitler exploited the readiness of a civilized nation to shed the thin layer of its uncomfortably carried restraints, leading to the unspeakable events of the decade between 1935 and 1945. But the truth is—it must be admitted with sadness—that such events are not bestial, in the primary sense of the word, but that they are decidedly human. They are an intrinsic part of the human condition, a strand in the web of the complex pattern which makes up the human situation. So long as we turn away from these phenomena in terror and disgust and indignantly declare them to be a reversal to barbarism, a regression to the primitive and animal-like, so long do we deprive ourselves of the chance of increasing our understanding of human aggressivity and of our mastery over it. The psychoanalyst must, therefore, not shrink from the task of applying his knowledge about the individual to the field of history, in particular to the crucial role of human aggression as

it has shaped the history of man. Specifically, it is my conviction that we will reach tangible results by focusing our attention on human aggression as it arises from the matrix of archaic narcissism, i.e., on the phenomenon of narcissistic rage.

Human aggression is most dangerous when it is attached to the two great absolutarian psychological constellations: the grandiose self and the archaic omnipotent object. And the most gruesome human destructiveness is encountered not in the form of wild, regressive, and primitive behavior, but in the form of orderly and organized activities in which the perpetrators' destructiveness is alloyed with absolutarian convictions about their greatness and with their devotion to archaic omnipotent figures. I could support this thesis by quoting Himmler's self-pityingly boastful and idolatrous speeches to those cadres of the S.S. who were the executors of the extermination policies of the Nazis (see Bracher, 1969); in particular p. 422f., i.e., the reference to Himmler's speech in Posen on October 4, 1943); (see also Loewenberg, 1971p. 639)—but I know that I shall be forgiven for not displaying this evidence here.

## On Narcissistic Rage

In its undisguised form narcissistic rage is a familiar experience which is in general easily identified by the empathic observer of human behavior. But what is its dynamic essence? How should it be classified? How should we outline the concept and define the meaning of the term?

I shall first respond to the last of these interrelated questions. Strictly speaking, the term narcissistic rage refers to only one specific band in the wide spectrum of experiences that reaches from such trivial occurrences as a fleeting annoyance when



someone fails to reciprocate our greeting or does not respond to our joke to such ominous derangements as the furor of the catatonic and the grudges of the paranoiac. Following Freud's example (1921p. 91), however, I shall use the term "a potiori" and refer to all the points in the spectrum as narcissistic rage, since with this designation we are referring to the most characteristic or best known of a series of experiences which not only form a continuum but, with all their differences, are essentially related to each other.

But what is it that all these different experiences, which we designate by the same term, have in common? In what psychological category do they all belong? What are their common determinants? And what is their common meta-psychological substance?

It is self-evident that narcissistic rage belongs to the large psychological field of aggression, anger, and destructiveness; and that it constitutes a specific, circumscribed phenomenon within this great area. From the point of view of social psychology, furthermore, it is clearly analogous to the fight component of the fight-flight reaction with which biological organisms respond to attack. Stated more specifically, it is easily observed that the narcissistically vulnerable individual responds to actual (or anticipated) narcissistic injury either with shamefaced withdrawal (flight) or with narcissistic rage (fight).

Since narcissistic rage is clearly a manifestation of the human propensity toward aggressive responses, some analysts believe that it requires no further explanation once the preconscious motivational context in which it is likely to occur has been established. Alexander, for example, dealt with this important psychological phenomenon by identifying its position in a typical sequence of preconscious and conscious attitudes. He

attempted to clarify the psychological significance and the meta-psychological position of shame and rage, these two principal experiential and behavioral manifestations of disturbed narcissistic equilibrium, in a paper (1938) which has influenced the relevant work of a number of authors (e.g., Saul, 1947); (Piers and Singer, 1953); (and, with wider individual elaborations, Eidelberg, 1959); (and Jacobson, 1964). In this contribution he presented the schema of a self-perpetuating cycle of psychological phenomena—an explanatory device which is appealing in its pedagogical clarity and in its similarity to formulations which are cogently employed in other branches of science, e.g., in physics. Specifically he described the dynamic cycle of hostility, guilt, submission, reactive aggression, guilt, etc. He thus restricted himself to explaining narcissistic rage (in his terms: reactive aggression which follows upon shameful submission) in the context of the motivational dynamics of (pre)conscious experiences and overt behavior without investigating this phenomenon in-depth, i.e., without the attempt to uncover its unconscious dimensions and its developmental roots.

Narcissistic rage occurs in many forms; they all share, however, a specific psychological flavor which gives them a distinct position within the wide realm of human aggressions. The need for revenge, for righting a wrong, for undoing a hurt by whatever means, and a deeply anchored, unrelenting compulsion in the pursuit of all these aims which gives no rest to those who have suffered a narcissistic injury—these are features which are characteristic for the phenomenon of narcissistic rage in all its forms and which set it apart from other kinds of aggression.

And what is the specific significance of those psychological injuries (such as ridicule, contempt, and conspicuous defeat)

which tend to provoke narcissistic rage; and how do these specific external provocations interact with the sensitized aspects of the rage-and revenge-prone personality?

The propensity toward narcissistic rage in the Japanese, for example, is attributed by Ruth Benedict (1946) to their methods of child-rearing through ridicule and the threat of ostracism, and to the sociocultural importance which maintaining decorum has in Japan. Small wonder, therefore, says Benedict, that “sometimes people explode in the most aggressive acts. They are roused to these aggressions not when their principles or their freedom is challenged ... but when they detect an insult or a detraction” (p. 293).

The desire to turn a passive experience into an active one (Freud, 1920p. 16), the mechanism of identification with the aggressor (A. Freud, 1936), the sadistic tensions retained in individuals who as children had been treated sadistically by their parents—all these factors help explain the readiness of the shame-prone individual to respond to a potentially shame-provoking situation by the employment of a simple remedy: the active (often anticipatory) inflicting on others of those narcissistic injuries which he is most afraid of suffering himself.

Mr. P., for example, who was exceedingly shame-prone and narcissistically vulnerable, was a master of a specific form of social sadism. Although he came from a conservative family, he had become very liberal in his political and social outlook. He was always eager, however, to inform himself about the national and religious background of acquaintances and, avowedly in the spirit of rationality and lack of prejudice, embarrassed them at social gatherings by introducing the topic of their minority status into the conversation. Although he defended himself against the recognition of the significance of his malicious

maneuvers by well-thought-out rationalizations, he became in time aware of the fact that he experienced an erotically tinged excitement at these moments. There was, according to his description, a brief moment of silence in the conversation in which the victim struggled for composure after public attention had been directed to his social handicap and, although all acted as if they had not noticed the victim's embarrassment, the emotional significance of the situation was clear to everyone. Mr. P.'s increasing realization of the true nature of his sadistic attacks through the public exposure of a social defect, and his gradually deepening awareness of his own fear of exposure and ridicule, led to his recall of violent emotions of shame and rage in childhood. His mother, the daughter of a Fundamentalist minister, not only had embarrassed and shamed the boy in public, but had insisted on exposing and inspecting his genitals—as she claimed, to find out whether he had masturbated. As a child he had formed vengeful fantasies—the precursors of his current sadistic enactments—in which he would cruelly expose his mother to his own and to other peoples' gaze.

The existence of heightened sadism, the adoption of a policy of preventive attack, the need for revenge, and the desire to turn a passive experience into an active one<sup>6</sup>, do not, however, fully account for some of the most characteristic features of narcissistic rage. In its typical forms there is utter disregard for reasonable limitations and a boundless wish to redress an injury and to obtain revenge. The irrationality of the vengeful attitude becomes even more frightening in view of the fact that—in narcissistic personalities as in the paranoiac—the reasoning capacity, while totally under the domination and in the service of the overriding emotion, is often not only intact but even sharpened. (This dangerous feature of individual psychopathology

is the parallel of an equally malignant social phenomenon: the subordination of the rational class of technicians to a paranoid leader and the efficiency—and even brilliance—of their amoral cooperation in carrying out his purposes.<sup>7</sup>

## Two Phenomena Related to Narcissistic Rage

I shall now examine two forms of anger which are related to narcissistic rage: the anger of a person who, due to cerebral defect or brain injury, is unable to solve certain simple problems; and the anger of a child who has suffered a minor painful injury.

### The “Catastrophic Reaction” and Similar Occurrences

If a person with a brain defect strives unsuccessfully to perform some task that should be easily accomplished—naming a familiar object, for example, or putting a round or square peg into the fitting hole—he may respond to his incapacity with the intense and frenzied anger that is known as “catastrophic reaction” (Goldstein, 1948).<sup>8</sup> His rage is due to the fact that he is suddenly not in control of his own thought processes, of a function which people consider to be most intimately their own—i.e., as a part of the self. “It must not be! It cannot be!” the aphasic feels when he is unable to name a familiar object such as a pencil; and his furious refusal to accept the unpleasant truth that his incapacity is a reality is heightened by the fact that his spontaneous speech may be comparatively undisturbed and that his sensorium is clear.

Our thought processes are taken by us as belonging to the core of our self, and we refuse to admit that we may not be in control of them. To be deprived of the capacity to name a familiar object

or to solve a simple problem is experienced as more incredible than even the loss of a limb. Our own body can be seen and, since perception is primarily directed toward the outside world, it is easier to think of our body in objective terms. The unseeable thought processes, however, are considered by us as inseparable from, or coinciding with, our very self. The loss of a limb can therefore be mourned, like the loss of a love object<sup>9</sup>; a defect in the realm of our mental functions, however, is experienced as a loss of self.

An attenuated variant of the catastrophic reaction is familiar to all: the annoyance when we cannot recall a word or name. And our patients, especially early in analysis, experience slips of the tongue and other manifestations of the unconscious as narcissistic blows. They are enraged about the sudden exposure of their lack of omnipotence in the area of their own mind—not about having disclosed a specific unconscious wish or fantasy. “... the trace of affect which follows the revelation of the slip,” Freud said, “is clearly in the nature of shame” (1901p. 83).

It is instructive to observe our own behavior after we have made a slip of the tongue, especially in a situation such as a lecture in which our exhibitionism is mobilized. The victim’s reaction to the amusement of the audience is quite specific: he pretends either that the revelation had been intentional or he claims, at least, that he understands the meaning of the slip and can interpret it himself. Our immediate tendency is thus to deny our loss of control rather than to obliterate the unconscious content. Or, expressed differently: our defensive activity is primarily motivated by our shame concerning a defect in the realm of the omnipotent and omniscient grandiose self, not by guilt over the unconscious forbidden sexual or aggressive impulse which was revealed.

The excessive preoccupation with a situation in which one has suffered a shameful narcissistic injury (e.g., a social faux pas) must similarly be understood as an enraged attempt to eradicate the reality of the incident by magical means, even to the point of wishing to do away with oneself in order to wipe out the tormenting memory in this fashion.

## The Child's Reaction to Painful Injuries

The other phenomenon that illuminates the significance of narcissistic rage is the emotional reaction of children to slight injuries. When a child has stubbed his toe or pinched his finger, his response expresses a number of feelings. We might say with Freud (1926) that in the child's feelings "certain things seem to be joined together ... which will later on be separated out" (p. 169). The child gives voice not only to his physical pain and fear, but also to his wounded narcissism. "How can it be? How can it happen?" his outraged cries seem to ask. And it is instructive to observe how he may veer back and forth between enraged protests at the imperfection of his grandiose self and angry reproaches against the omnipotent self-object for having permitted the insult.<sup>10</sup>

## The Experiential Content of Narcissistic Rage

The various forms of narcissistic rage, the catastrophic reaction of the brain-damaged, and the child's outrage at being suddenly exposed to a painful injury are experiences which are far apart in their psychological impact and social consequences. Yet underlying all these emotional states is the uncompromising insistence on the perfection of the idealized self-object and on

the limitlessness of the power and knowledge of a grandiose self which must remain the equivalence of “purified pleasure” (Freud, 1915p. 136). The fanaticism of the need for revenge and the unending compulsion of having to square the account after an offense are therefore not the attributes of an aggressivity which is integrated with the mature purposes of the ego—on the contrary, such bedevilment indicates that the aggression was mobilized in the service of an archaic grandiose self and that it is deployed within the framework of an archaic perception of reality. The shame-prone individual who is ready to experience setbacks as narcissistic injuries and to respond to them with insatiable rage does not recognize his opponent as a center of independent initiative with whom he happens to be at cross-purposes. Aggressions employed in the pursuit of maturely experienced causes are not limitless. However vigorously mobilized, their goal is definite: the defeat of the enemy who blocks the way to a cherished goal. The narcissistically injured, on the other hand, cannot rest until he has blotted out a vaguely experienced offender who dared to oppose him, to disagree with him, or to outshine him. “Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of the mall?” the grandiose-exhibitionistic self is asking. And when it is told that there is someone fairer, cleverer, or stronger, then, like the evil stepmother in *Snow White*, it cannot ever find rest anymore because it can never wipe out the evidence which has contradicted its conviction that it is unique and perfect.

The opponent who is the target of our mature aggressions is experienced as separate from ourselves, whether we attack him because he blocks us in reaching our object-libidinal goals or hate him because he interferes with the fulfillment of our reality-integrated narcissistic wishes. The enemy, however, who calls



forth the archaic rage of the narcissistically vulnerable is seen by him not as an autonomous source of impulses, but as a flaw in a narcissistically perceived reality. He is a recalcitrant part of an expanded self over which he expects to exercise full control and whose mere independence or other-ness is an offense.

It has now become clear that narcissistic rage arises when self or object fail to live up to the absolutarian expectations which are directed at their function—whether by the child who, more or less phase-appropriately, insists on the grandiosity and omnipotence of the self and the self-object or by the narcissistically fixated adult whose archaic narcissistic structures have remained unmodified because they became isolated from the rest of the growing psyche after the phase-appropriate narcissistic demands of childhood had been traumatically frustrated. Or, describing the psychodynamic pattern in different words, we can say: although everybody tends to react to narcissistic injuries with embarrassment and anger, the most intense experiences of shame and the most violent forms of narcissistic rage arise in those individuals for whom a sense of absolute control over an archaic environment is indispensable because the maintenance of self-esteem—and indeed of the self—depends on the unconditional availability of the approving-mirroring functions of an admiring self-object, or on the ever-present opportunity for a merger with an idealized one.

Narcissistic rage occurs in a variety of forms which occupy a wide spectrum of diverse experiences and divergent behavioral manifestations: from the deepest and most inflexible grudge of the paranoiac to the apparently fleeting rage reaction of the narcissistically vulnerable after a minor slight. All instances of narcissistic rage have, nevertheless, certain features in common

because they all arise from the matrix of a narcissistic or pre-narcissistic view of the world. It is this archaic mode of experience which explains the fact that those who are in the grip of narcissistic rage show total lack of empathy toward the offender. It explains the unmodifiable wish to blot out the offense which was perpetrated against the grandiose self and the unforgiving fury which arises when the control over the mirroring self-object is lost or when the omnipotent self-object is unavailable. And the empathic observer will understand the deeper significance of the often seemingly minor irritant which has provoked an attack of narcissistic rage and will not be taken aback by the seemingly disproportionate severity of the reaction.

These considerations are, of course, also valid within the context of the psychoanalytic situation. Everybody tends to react to psychoanalysis as a narcissistic injury because it gives the lie to our conviction that we are in full control of our mind (see Freud, 1917b). The most severe narcissistic resistances against analysis, however, will arise in those patients whose archaic need to claim omniscience and total control had remained comparatively unaltered because they had been too rapidly or phase inappropriately deprived of an omniscient self-object or had received inadequate confirmation of the phase-appropriate conviction of the perfection of the self.

## Can Ego Dominance over Narcissistic Rage Be Achieved through Psychoanalysis?

Can narcissistic rage be tamed, i.e., can it come under the dominance of the ego? The answer to this question is affirmative—but the “yes” must be qualified and defined.

When during the analysis of a narcissistic personality disturbance a defensive wall of apparent tranquillity which had been maintained with the aid of social isolation, detachment, and fantasied superiority begins to give way, then one has the right to consider the emergence of narcissistic rage, of sudden attacks of fury at narcissistic injuries, as a sign of the loosening of a rigid personality structure and thus of analytic progress. These developments must therefore be neither censured by the analyst, nor hurriedly identified as a part of an archaic psychological world, but must for some time be accepted with implicit approval. Yet, whether present from the beginning of the analysis in the narcissistic analysand, or arising after a therapeutic loosening of his personality, such rage must not be confused with mature aggression. Narcissistic rage enslaves the ego and allows it to function only as its tool and rationalizer. Mature aggression, however, is under the control of the ego, and the degree of its neutralization is regulated by the ego in conformance with the purposes for which it is employed. The mobilization of narcissistic rage is therefore not an end point in analysis, but the beginning of a new phase—a phase of working through which is concluded when ego dominance in this sector of the personality has been established. The transformation of narcissistic rage, however, is not achieved directly—e.g., via appeals to the ego to increase its control over the angry impulses—but is brought about indirectly, secondary to the

gradual transformation of the matrix of narcissism from which the rage arose. The analysand's archaic exhibitionism and grandiosity must be gradually transformed into aim inhibited self-esteem and realistic ambitions; and his desire to merge into an archaic omnipotent self-object has to be replaced by attitudes which are under the control of the ego, e.g., by his enthusiasm for meaningful ideals and by his devotion to them. Concomitantly with these changes the narcissistic rage will gradually subside and the analysand's maturely modulated aggressions will be employed in the service of a securely established self and in the service of cherished values.

The relinquishment of narcissistic claims—the precondition for the subsidence of narcissistic rage—is, however, not absolute. (See in this context Tausk, 1913.). In accepting the existence of an unconscious psychic life, for example, we are not unconditionally renouncing a narcissistic position which had sustained the cohesion of the self, but we are shifting the focus of our narcissism on different ideational contents and are modulating the neutralization of the narcissistic cathexes. Instead of sustaining our sense of self-assurance through the belief in the all-encompassing scope of our consciousness, we now derive a new self-respect from such derivatives of qualities of the grandiose, omniscient self as the satisfaction of knowing about the existence of an unconscious; or from such derivatives of the relationship with the omniscient and omnipotent self-object as the joy about the superego's approval concerning our stamina in tolerating unpleasant aspects of reality or the joy about having lived up to the example of an admired teacher-figure, Freud.

My emphasis on the fact that narcissism need not be destroyed but that it can be transformed is in tune with my

support of a non-hypocritical attitude toward narcissism as a psychological force *sui generis* which has its own line of development and which neither should—nor indeed could—be relinquished. In the psychoanalytic situation, too, the analyst's non-hypocritical attitude toward narcissism, his familiarity with the forms and transformations of this psychic constellation, and his uncensorious recognition of its biological and sociocultural value will diminish the analysand's narcissistic resistance and rage against the analytic procedure. The analyst's accepting objectivity toward the patient's narcissism can, of course, not do away with all narcissistic resistance and rage, but it will reduce the nonspecific initial resistance against a procedure in which another person may know something about one's thoughts and wishes before one knows them oneself. Through the diminution of the nonspecific narcissistic resistances, however, recognition of the significance of specific narcissistic resistances as repetition and transference is facilitated.

The analyst must therefore at first not ally himself unqualifiedly with the patient's reality ego when it rejects the claims of the unmodified grandiose self or when it tries to deny the persisting infantile need for full control over the narcissistically invested self-object.<sup>11</sup> On the contrary, he must even be understandingly tolerant of the rage which emerges in the patient when his narcissistic needs are not totally and immediately fulfilled. If the analyst maintains his empathic attitude toward the patient's needs and toward his anger, and if in response to the analyst's attitude the patient's reality ego, too, learns to be understandingly accepting of the demands of the grandiose self and of its propensity toward rage, then there will be a diminution of those nonspecific resistances in which the patient who feels treated like a naughty child begins indeed to act like

a misunderstood naughty child. Only then will the specific resistances against the uncovering of specific repressed needs, wishes, and attitudes be brought into play. The nonspecific narcissistic resistances are in general accompanied by a great deal of rage; the specific resistances, however, are usually characterized by the presence of hypochondria and of other vague fears. The transference reactivation of the original need for approval through mirroring, and for the merger with an idealized archaic object, increases narcissistic tension and leads to hypochondria; and it creates the vague dread of having again to suffer the old traumatic rejection from the side of an environment which will not respond empathically to the rekindled narcissistic needs of childhood.

## The Transformation of Narcissistic Rage into Mature Aggression

It is often more revealing to examine transitional phenomena than the extremes of a spectrum of contrasting manifestations; and it is often more instructive to study intermediate points in a developmental sequence than to compare its beginning with its end. This maxim also holds true for the study of the transformation of narcissistic rage into mature aggression: the way stations of this development and the remaining imperfections deserve our attention.

Patient A.'s insufficiently idealized superego could not provide him with an adequate internal supply of narcissistic sustenance (see the discussion of this case in Kohut, 1971pp. 57-73) and he needed external approbation in order to maintain his narcissistic balance. He became, therefore, inordinately dependent on idealized figures in his environment whose praise he craved.

Every time they remained unresponsive, because they failed to sense his need, he became enraged and criticized them with bitterness and sarcasm during the analytic sessions. When, however, as a result of the extensive working through of his idealizing transference, his structural defect became ameliorated, his rage changed. He continued to complain about the current stand-ins for the archaic idealized figure (his father who had disappointed him in his early life), but his attacks became less bitter and sarcastic, acquired an admixture of humor, and were more in tune with the real shortcomings of those whom he criticized. And there was another remarkable change: while he had formerly nourished his grudges in isolation (even in the analytic sessions his complaints were predominantly soliloquy, not message), he now banded together with his fellow workers and was able to savor, in enjoyable comradeship with them, the pleasure of prolonged bull sessions in which the bosses were taken apart. In still later stages of his analysis when the patient had already mastered a large part of his psychological difficulties, and especially when certain homosexual fantasies of which he was very ashamed had disappeared, some anger at idealized figures for withholding their approval continued to be in evidence—but now there was not only benign humor instead of sarcasm, and companionship instead of isolation, but also the ability to see some positive features in those he criticized, side by side with their defects.

Now another clinical example: patient P., whose attitude toward his 8-year-old son was very revealing.<sup>12</sup> He was in general on excellent terms with the boy and spent a good deal of time with him in enjoyably shared activities. He could, however, become suddenly outraged about minor transgressions, and would then punish the child severely. Slowly, as

the analysis proceeded, he became aware of his narcissistic vulnerability and realized that he tended to respond with violent anger when he felt frustrated by narcissistically cathected objects. Yet, he was at first unable to recognize the often seemingly unmistakable fact that he reacted to the trauma of a narcissistic injury by becoming unduly harsh toward his son. He remained convinced that his severity was objectively justified, was adamant in the defense of his behavior, and claimed that consistency and unbending justice were better for his son than ill-placed kindness and unprincipled tolerance. His rationalizations seemed foolproof for a long time and no headway was made in the analysis. His moralistic punitiveness finally began to subside, and was replaced by his growing empathy for his son, after the memory of certain childhood scenes was recovered in the analysis and after their dynamic significance was understood. His mother had always reacted with severe, morally buttressed punishments when he attempted to extricate himself from her narcissistic universe. He now did likewise when he felt that an alter ego tried to withdraw from him—either the analyst through activities (such as a temporary interruption of the treatment) which upset the balance of the narcissistic transference, or the son through activities which demonstrated his growing independence from him. It had usually been one of the latter moves—such as the son's stepping over to the neighbor's garden without having asked the father's permission; or his returning home behind time, even by one or two minutes—which the patient had considered a serious misdeed and had punished severely.

In both of the preceding examples I restricted myself to presenting a sequence of clinical events which demonstrates how narcissistic rage subsides (and is gradually replaced by



aggressions which are under the control of the ego) in consequence of the analytically achieved transformation of the narcissistic matrix from which it arises. The first example (Mr. A.) illustrates how the patient's sarcastic rage gradually became tamed and how his empathy for the targets of his rage increased as the patient's neediness vis-à-vis the idealized object diminished. The second example (Mr. P.) illustrates how the patient's moralistic punitiveness became gradually tamed and how his empathy with the victim of his rage increased as the patient began to master his narcissistic involvement with alter-ego figures and grasped the fact that he was repeating a crucial situation from his own childhood.

## Therapeutic Implications

I have here reached a point at which the convergence of clinical experience and theoretical reflection permits me to summarize, and to restate certain conclusions. Our therapeutic aim with regard to narcissistic rage is neither the direct transformation of the rage into constructive aggression nor the direct establishment of controls over the rage by the autonomous ego. Our principal goal is the gradual transformation of the narcissistic matrix from which the rage arises. If this objective is reached, then the aggressions in the narcissistic sector of the personality will be employed in the service of the realistic ambitions and purposes of a securely established self and in the service of the cherished ideals and goals of a superego which has taken over the function of the archaic omnipotent object and has become independent from it.

It must be admitted that in practice, e.g., at the end of a generally successful analysis of a narcissistic personality

disturbance, it is at times not easy to assess to what extent the propensity toward narcissistic rage has been overcome; that it is at times not easy to know whether the aggressions are now the activities of a mature self and are under the dominance of the ego. But, as is true in general with regard to the completion of the analytic task in other sectors of the personality, so also here: we must make no excessive demands on our patients or on ourselves. On the contrary, the patient should face openly the fact that there exists in him a residual propensity to be temporarily under the sway of narcissistic rage when his archaic narcissistic expectations are frustrated and that he must be alert to the possibility that he might be overtaken by a tantrum. Such openly faced awareness of the existence of residual psychopathology will stand the patient in good stead when after the termination of the analysis he has to tend his psychological household without the aid of the analyst.<sup>13</sup>

The persistence of some subtle and seemingly peripheral manifestations of psychic malfunctioning is at times more dependable evidence of the incompleteness of the analytic work than the occasional recurrence of gross behavioral disturbance under stress. In the area of our scrutiny, in particular, we may be able to recognize one, often rather inconspicuous, residual of psychic malfunctioning which is, in my experience, an especially reliable indication that the work is still unfinished: the persistence of the patient's inability to mobilize even a modicum of empathy for the person who is the target of his anger. I consider this disturbance in empathy of much greater significance when I attempt to evaluate analytic progress than the patient's propensity to react occasionally—and under unusual stress—with the flare-up of the kind of rage which before the analysis had occurred frequently and in response to minor

provocations. A patient's total and abiding lack of compassion for the offender and his arrogant and rigid refusal even to try to consider the other's position or motivations are, in other words, more reliable signs of the incompleteness of the analytic work in the narcissistic sector of the personality than the degree and the form of the residual rage attacks. Patient P.'s unfeeling moralism toward his son, and the immovable dogmatism of his conviction that he was acting appropriately when meting out the punishments, demonstrated more clearly that his behavior was in essence motivated by narcissistic rage than did the severity of the penalties which he imposed on the child. True enough, the penalties were disproportionate. (Unsurprisingly, they consisted mainly in the vindictive reestablishment of his narcissistic control in the form of the prolonged withdrawal from his son of such privileges as leaving the house; or in the boy's being banished to his room.) They were, however, never inflicted in an uncontrolled or in a sadistic manner.

## A Metapsychological Formulation of Narcissistic Rage

The scrutiny of aggression as it is interrelated with the area of narcissism has, up to this point, been focused on the phenomenology of narcissistic rage and on the explanation of the matrix of archaic narcissism from which it arises. As my final task I shall now attempt to explain narcissistic rage in metapsychological terms—even though I know that metapsychology has fallen into disrepute and is considered by some to be hardly more than a sterile thought exercise.

In previous contributions (Kohut, 1966), (1968), (1971) I provided a meta-psychological formulation of the emotion of shame. I said that it develops under the following conditions.

Exhibitionistic libido is mobilized and deployed for discharge in expectation of mirroring and approving responses either from the environment or—I spoke in this context of “shame signals”—from the idealized superego, i.e., from the internal structure which took over the approving functions from the archaic environment. If the expected response is not forthcoming, however, then the flow of the exhibitionistic libido becomes disturbed. Instead of a smooth suffusion of self and body-self with a warm glow of approved and echoed exhibitionistic libido, the discharge and deployment processes disintegrate. The unexpected noncooperation of the mirroring object creates a psychoeconomic imbalance which disrupts the ego’s capacity to regulate the outpouring of the exhibitionistic cathexes. In consequence of its temporary paralysis the ego yields, on the one hand, to the pressure of the exhibitionistic urge, while, on the other hand, it strives desperately to stop the flow. The exhibitionistic surface of the body-self, the skin, shows therefore not the pleasant warmth of successful exhibitionism, but heat and blushing side by side with pallor.<sup>14</sup> It is this disorganized mixture of massive discharge (tension decrease) and blockage (tension increase) in the area of exhibitionistic libido which is experienced as shame.

Similar considerations also apply to the experience of narcissistic rage. But while the essential disturbance which underlies the experience of shame concerns the boundless exhibitionism of the grandiose self, the essential disturbance underlying rage relates to the omnipotence of this narcissistic structure. The grandiose self expects absolute control over a narcissistically experienced archaic environment. The appropriate mechanisms—they belong to the aggression-control-power sector of the personality—are set in motion, in expectation of total

dominance over the self-object. When the environment fails to comply, however—be it the unempathic mother who does not respond to the child's wishes or the table leg which noncompliantly is in the way of the child's toe; or an analogous unempathic archaic object in the world of a narcissistically fixated adult—then the formerly smoothly deployed forces become deranged. Paralleling the processes described with regard to shame, we see discharge and inhibition side by side or in rapid succession, except that here, as stated before, the underlying force is not the grandiose self's boundless exhibitionism, i.e., its insistence on being admired, but its omnipotence, i.e., its insistence on the exercise of total control. It is the disorganized mixture of massive discharge (tension decrease) and blockage (tension increase) in the area of unneutralized aggression, arising after the noncompliance of the archaic self-object, which is the meta-psychological substratum of the manifestations and of the experience of narcissistic rage.

### Chronic Narcissistic Rage

If the rage does not subside, it may be added here, then the secondary processes tend to be pulled increasingly into the domain of the archaic aggressions which seek to re-establish control over a narcissistically experienced world. Conscious and preconscious ideation, in particular as it concerns the aims and goals of the personality, becomes more and more subservient to the pervasive rage. The ego, furthermore, increasingly surrenders its reasoning capacity to the task of rationalizing the persisting insistence on the limitlessness of the power of the grandiose self: it does not acknowledge the inherent limitations of the power of the self, but attributes its failures

and weaknesses to the malevolence and corruption of the uncooperative archaic object. We are thus witnessing the gradual establishment of chronic narcissistic rage, one of the most pernicious afflictions of the human psyche—either, in its still endogenous and preliminary form, as grudge and spite; or, externalized and acted out, in disconnected vengeful acts or in a cunningly plotted vendetta.<sup>15</sup>

## Concluding Remarks

A number of the topics discussed in this essay, especially those taken up in the retrospective survey of my earlier work (i.e., on the libidinal investment of the self), were of necessity only sketchily formulated and need elaboration. But what I regret even more than the shortcomings of this condensed presentation is the fact that I was unable to demonstrate the application of my older formulations about narcissism and of the preceding considerations about narcissistic rage to group psychology, to the behavior of man in history.

I hope very much that further efforts in this area will prove to be fruitful. But this is for the future, and only that much I would like to mention. I have begun work proceeding in two directions. First, regarding the contribution which the understanding of narcissism can make to the understanding of the formation and cohesion of groups: in particular the fact that group cohesion is brought about and maintained not only by an ego ideal held in common by the members of the group (Freud, 1921) but also by their shared subject-bound grandiosity, i.e., by a shared grandiose self. Indeed, there are groups which are characterized by the fact that they are held together by this latter bond— crudely stated, by their shared

ambitions rather than by their shared ideals. Secondly, the psychic life of groups, like that of individuals, shows regressive transformations in the narcissistic realm. When the deployment of higher forms of narcissism is interfered with (such as, in the area of the grandiose self, through the blocking of acceptable outlets for national prestige; and in the area of the idealized parent imago, through the destruction of group values, e.g., religious values), then the narcissism of groups regresses, with deleterious consequences in the realm of group behavior. Such regressions become manifest in particular with regard to group aggression, which then takes on, overtly and covertly, the flavor of narcissistic rage in either its acute or, even more ominously, in its chronic form.

But this is work which still needs to be completed, even in its preliminary form, and I must resist the temptation of saying more about it at this point.

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# Notes

## THOUGHTS ON NARCISSISM AND NARCISSISTIC RAGE

- 1 To be exact one would have to call this point in development the period of the formation of the nuclear self and self-object. The archaic self-object is, of course, still (experienced as) part of the self.
- 2 See in this context the differentiation between (a) psychosis, i.e., permanent or protracted fragmentation of the nuclear grandiose self and the nuclear omnipotent self-object, and (b) narcissistic personality disturbance, i.e., insecure cohesion of the nuclear self and self-object with only fleeting fragmentation of these configurations. See, furthermore, the classification of the disorders whose essential psychopathology consists in permanent or protracted fragmentation of the self or self-object, i.e., the psychoses. They fall into three groups, namely: (a) those cases, the frank psychoses, where the symptomatology openly reflects the breakup of the nuclear narcissistic structures; (b) those cases, the latent psychoses or borderline cases, where the symptomatology hides to a greater or lesser extent the fact that a breakup of the nuclear narcissistic structures has taken place; and (c) those cases, the schizoid personalities, where a breakup of the nuclear narcissistic structures (the development of an overt or latent psychosis) is the ever-present pathognomonic potentiality, which is however prevented by the patient's careful avoidance (through emotional distancing) of regression-provoking narcissistic injuries (Kohut, 1971, Ch. 1).
- 3 Freud (1914a), however, spoke of "the valuable work he [Adler] had done on 'organ-inferiority'" (p. 51).
- 4 Lionel Trilling (1947), who reviewed Emil Ludwig's *Dr. Freud*, closed his remarks about this biography with the following trenchant sentence: "We are not an age notable for fineness and precision of thought, but it is seldom indeed that we get a book as intellectually discreditable, as disingenuous and as vulgar as this."
- 5 This quasi-delusion is, of course, a manifestation of the archaic exhibitionistic urge which (a) is isolated from the rest of the psychic organization and

(b) projected (with reversed aim) upon the person who is the supposedly gloating on-looker. The relationship between this phenomenon and the paranoid's delusion of being watched is obvious.

- 6 Many psychotherapists, including psychoanalysts, traumatize their patients unnecessarily by sarcastic attacks on their archaic narcissism. Despite the analyst's increasing understanding of the significance of the reactivation of the patient's archaic narcissistic demands, such tendencies are hard to overcome and the analyst's inappropriate sarcasm intrudes again and again. The difficulty is, in some instances at least, due to the fact that the psychotherapist (or analyst) had himself been treated in similar fashion (by his parents and teachers, for example; and, specifically, by his training analyst). The fact that an analyst will persist, despite insight and effort, in his nontherapeutic sarcasm toward his narcissistic patients is evidence for the power of the need to turn a passive experience into an active one. In addition, we must not disregard the fact that the motivator of the deleterious attitude (i.e., the urge, which is deeply rooted in the unconscious, to inflict a narcissistic injury on others) can be easily rationalized. Specifically, the therapist's attacks can be justified as being undertaken for the good of the patient and in the service of a realism- or a maturity-morality.
- 7 For a discussion of these events in National-Socialist Germany see Rauschnig (1938). The relationship of Speer, Minister for Armaments and War Production—an organizational genius—to Hitler is especially revealing in this context (see Speer, 1969).
- 8 The organic defect itself undoubtedly contributes to the diminution of the capacity to control emotions and impulses. Yet, many patients who respond with the catastrophic reaction under comparatively bland conditions (e.g., in the harmless test situation) will not react with equal intensity under different circumstances which might arouse anger (e.g., when they are being teased or otherwise annoyed).
- 9 Tolstoy's description of Anatole Kurágin's farewell to his amputated leg is a deeply moving illustration of this process (1866, Book 10, Ch. 7p. 907f.).
- 10 When the archaic self-object does not provide the needed narcissistic sustenance or does not prevent or dispel the child's discomfort, it is held to be sadistic by the child because it is experienced as all-powerful and all-knowing, and thus the consequences of its actions and omissions are always viewed by the child as having been brought about intentionally.
- 11 This advice is valid not only where the grandiosity is on the whole in

repression (horizontal split in the psyche), but also where the archaic narcissistic claims are bypassing the reality ego (vertical split), i.e., where the ego is disavowing the presence or significance of the narcissistic claims and enactments (see Kohut, 1971pp. 183ff.).

- 12 I examined another, though not unrelated, aspect of this patient's behavior earlier in this presentation. (He is also referred to, but here in a clearly different context, in Kohut, 1971pp. 321-324.) At a meeting of the Chicago Psychoanalytic Society (September 25, 1962), in discussing a presentation on psychosomatic disturbances (Bonnard, 1963), I described a transient speech disorder of the then 3½-year-old son of Mr. P. (see Kavka, 1962, esp. p. 176). I interpreted the child's stammer as a reaction to his father's narcissistic involvement with him and to his father's insistence on absolute control over him.
- 13 I am here advocating the taking of an attitude of tolerance vis-à-vis a relationship between ego and id which is neither one of ego autonomy nor of ego dominance—i.e., which is less than optimal. The comparative evaluation, however, which is implied in this context warrants a metapsychological elucidation. Ego autonomy is achieved when the ego can function without being disturbed by pressures from the depth. Ego dominance is achieved when the archaic forces have become integrated with the ego and when their power can be employed in accordance with the ego's purposes. When I speak acceptingly, however, of a former patient's post-analytic attitude of alertness with regard to the possibility that he might be overtaken by an attack of narcissistic rage, I am endorsing a condition which is, according to a strict definition of these terms, neither ego autonomy nor ego dominance (although it is closer to the former than to the latter state). I am here referring to the ego's surveillance of untamed archaic forces: of the ego's handling or manipulating them. Such a relationship between ego and id may be considered a tolerable imperfection if it concerns a narrow sector of the psyche, i.e., if, on the whole, a broad transformation in the area of the relevant psychopathology has taken place. An analogy from another field may illustrate my meaning concerning the type of imperfection which I have in mind. I once knew a man who had so many muscular tics and spasms (probably on an organic basis) that his volitional motility was severely interfered with. He had, however, learned to wait for an appropriate tic movement that he could exploit for the action which he wanted to perform.
- 14 I am grateful to Dr. Milton Malev for bringing to my attention the following passage from the Babylonian Talmud (Epstein, 1962; Tractate Baba Meziap.

58B): "He who makes pale the face of his companion in public [i.e., embarrasses his companion], it is as if he had spilled his blood" (my italics). This statement not only predicates the intense painfulness of narcissistic injuries, it also appears to take for granted that the physiological correlate of the painful experience is a derangement of the distribution of blood (pallor and blushing: "makes pale the face" and "spilled his blood") in the exhibitionistic surface of the body, especially in the skin of the face.

- 15 The relation between (a) acute and (b) chronic narcissistic rage in the area of the omnipotence of the grandiose self is paralleled by the relation between (a) acute shame and (b) chronic feelings of inferiority in the area of the exhibitionism of this narcissistic structure. For completeness' sake it should also be mentioned here that narcissistic rage, especially in its chronic form, when it is blocked from being directed toward the self-object (which is experienced as being outside the self or body-self), may shift its focus and aim now at the self or at the body-self. The result in the first instance is self-destructive depression; the consequence in the second instance may be psychosomatic illness. It should be noted in this context that patient P. suffered not only from the manifestations of acute and chronic narcissistic rage (which were described earlier), but also from a rather severe degree of hypertension