

Book Reviews

Editor: Sidney Crown

Psychology of the Self and the Treatment of Narcissism.

By RICHARD D. CHESICK. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson. 1985. 367 pp. \$35.00.

'The psychology of the self' is the name now given to the theories and the approach to psychotherapy developed by Heinz Kohut and contained for the most part in his two books, *The Psychology of the Self* (1971) and *The Restoration of the Self* (1979). They have had an enormous influence on psychotherapists in the United States and to some extent elsewhere, and are clearly something all therapists should know about. It is not easy to read Kohut himself, and I have never been sure if it was worth taking the time and the trouble of getting to understand what he is talking about. This book will help readers to acquaint themselves with his ideas and form a personal judgement of them.

I have certainly found it fascinating to recognise how Kohut became preoccupied with narcissism and concepts of the self, which are the same issues which interest contemporary British psychoanalysts. His approach is totally different, however, and in its final version represents a turning away from psychoanalytic work.

Chessick seems to be experienced, not only as a psychiatrist and psychotherapist, but also as a philosopher. The bibliography lists 37 publications since his first in 1969, and no less than eight of these have been books. His chief preoccupation is with narcissistic disorders and borderline states, but his interests are wide and his erudition comes through clearly.

The book begins with an introduction to the concept of narcissism, via the Greek myth of Narcissus, and then quickly proceeds to review the psychoanalytic developments in this area, beginning with Freud. A fairly detailed account of Melanie Klein's views follows, and although Chessick is generally out of sympathy with Kleinian ideas he acknowledges them to be important and indeed suggests that they provide an alternative approach to some of the same issues which have occupied Kohut.

The largest and most important section of the book is the exposition of Kohut's theories, which is complicated by the fact that they changed as his ideas evolved. Chessick makes this relatively easy to follow by providing chapters on the first version, on Kohut in transition, and on the second version of the psychology of the self. These are preceded by a discussion of the definition of the self and by a short account of the role of the self in the work of Fairbairn, Winnicott, Balint, and Laing.

It is not possible to give an account of Kohut's ideas in this short review, but the interested reader will be able to

find out what Kohut means by a number of terms which are central to the understanding of his theories. Thus 'Narcissistic transference', 'empathy', 'selfobject', 'the grandiose self', 'the idealised parental image', 'the bipolar self', 'the varieties of mirror transference', 'narcissistic rage', and many other terms are clearly described and their importance discussed.

Kohut suggests that Freud presented us with a model of *guilty man*, so that psychoanalysis became preoccupied with conflict between love and hate and its consequences. The analyst becomes the representative of the patient's conscience, and instead of helping him, persecutes him. Kohut presents his model of the individual as *tragic man*. In his view the central issue facing the patient is the way he reacts to his failure to realise his ambitions and ideals. The cause of mental disorder is primarily put down to the failure of the parents to empathically understand and encourage the child's narcissism, and the therapist attempts to put this right by providing such understanding.

While most psychoanalysts consider that omnipotence, narcissism, and self-idealisation are defensive manoeuvres to deal with deeply disturbing experiences, Kohut emphasises the normal need for positive affirmation, which he considers leads to a proper sense of a cohesive self. He relates this to the glimmer in the mother's eye as she watches her baby with approval and admiration, and he teaches the therapist to allow similar idealising transferences to develop, in which the patient feels he can stimulate admiration and excitement in the therapist.

Further sections of this book present clinical material discussing some of Kohut's patients as well as those of the author, and these help the reader to apply the concepts clinically. There are also discussions of diagnosis and nosology, and a comparison with French views of the self as presented by Satre, Lacan, and Foucault. A special chapter on criticisms of Kohut is also useful, and although the author is clearly impressed with his work he is quite capable of discussing the problems it raises.

This is a very helpful book and a model of good exposition. Whether the reader will want to go on and study Kohut will depend on his approach to psychotherapy. Even those who prefer a psychoanalytic understanding will, however, find it useful and will be led to reconsider some of their own views as a result.

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