***Free Associations: Psychoanalysis and Culture, Media, Groups, Politics***

**Number 76 September 2019 ISSN: 2047-0622**

**URL:** [**http://www.freeassociations.org.uk/**](http://www.freeassociations.org.uk/)



**Whatever Happened to Human Nature?[[1]](#footnote-2)\***

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My main interest is human nature. That is what I study as a scholar, what I try to bear as a moral being and hope to change as a psychotherapist and political activist. But what is it? I don’t know, and I am not alone in this state of pursuing this topic for a long time and still not getting clear about it (see, e.g., Berry, 1986; Yankelovich, 1973). But I still think it’s well worth pursuing. I do this all the time as a person rattling round in the world. I spent about a decade trying to sort it out by studying the history of psychology and brain studies, a further decade preoccupied with matters Darwinian, then a decade with things Marxist and about the last fifteen years preoccupied with matters Freudian/Kleinian/Bionian. Put in terms of academic disciplines, that means (1) issues in philosophy around Cartesian mind-body dualism (Young, 1967, 1970, 1989, 1990); (2) history of ideas about what the Victorians called ‘man’s place in nature’ (Young, 1985, 1985a, 1993); (3) issues in cultural and ideological analysis about ideology as a material force in labour process theory and in the human sciences (Young, 1973, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1985b); and (4) problems concerned with the unconscious and the limitations of what people can bear and how much they can be helped to change by means of containment and insight (Young, 1986, 1994).

I can offer you a tidy and tiny harvest from all this tilling in various fields (see also Young, 1988). According to brain research, human nature is the ensemble of the functions of the brain. Beyond that, what it tells us depends on what we ask it. According to Darwinian biology, human nature is the product of biological evolution, and our horizons are biologically determined and limited by our stage of evolution. According to Marxism, human nature is an ensemble of social relations, and attempts to investigate it are constituted by the ideological determinations of the epoch. According to Freud, human nature is ‘the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species. This struggle is what all life essentially consists of, and the evolution of civilization may therefore be described as the struggle for life of the human species’ (Freud, 1930, p. 122). He adds that the sense of guilt is ‘the most important problem in the development of civilization’ and that ‘the price we pay for our advance in civilization is a loss of happiness through the heightening of the sense of guilt’ (p.134). This last point Freud calls ‘the final conclusion of our investigation’ (ibid.). What Klein and Bion say has been explored in previous chapters.

My distillation of four decades of drinking in and ruminating the various vintages of this harvest is that human nature is bittersweet and - as I experience it - more bitter than sweet, requiring a lot of stoical containment. If we look behind the intellectual and academic traditions I have mentioned we find something even less hopeful. We find a Judeo-Christian story of origins in which our ancestors had it all but blew it by succumbing to temptation - the temptation to know. There has been no true innocence since that moment in Paradise when Eve was beguiled by the serpent. For that disobedience, she and her partner acquired on behalf of all their progeny and theirs a huge set of burdens: knowledge of good and evil, self-consciousness and shame, sorrow and pain in childbirth; male chauvinism, toil, death and banishment from a place where all one’s needs were met without effort to the East of Eden where life was hard. And the next generation discovered sibling rivalry and fratricide that were punished with greater toil and a renewed banishment to the land of Nod. Thenceforward we have been born in sin and are in need of redemption by repentance and reparation and life-long struggle to do good in the face of profoundly ambivalent impulses, including the perverse urge to do wrong and enjoy it.

Freud’s conclusions, as Philip Reiff has so eloquently argued in Freud: The Mind of the Moralist, are really at no distance at all from those of the Old Testament. Freud was not very hopeful about redemption, though, as we can gather from The Future of an Illusion and related writings on religion. On the topic of Freud’s views on secular salvation Ernest Jones tells a revealing anecdote. He and a companion were the first foreign civilians to reach Vienna after the Great War. He had not seen Freud for six years. In a ensuing discussion of 'the vast changes in the European situation . . .

Freud surprised me by saying that he had recently had an interview with an ardent Communist and had been half converted to Bolshevism, as it was then called. He had been informed that the advent of Bolshevism would result in some years of misery and chaos and that these would be followed by universal peace, prosperity and happiness. Freud added, ‘I told him I believed the first half’ (Jones, 1953-57, vol. 3, p. 16).

My point in these introductory remarks is that my generation knows where it is with human nature: mired in misery, with little hope of getting very far. But we also had - and some still have - a sense that is summed up in the utterly pompous slogan that I have (along with Kipling and Gramsci) on my computer screen saver: ‘You will not complete the task, but you may not give it up’. If I am idle for more than five minutes, I will get that or ‘pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will’ or ‘if you can keep your head when all about you...’ or ‘my cup runneth over’ or ‘round the decay of that colossal wreck...’ or ‘but the greatest of these...’ There is one other: ‘simulacrum’. A simulacrum is an image without a referent, a semblance. I put it there to remind myself about the bleakness of certain currents in cultural theory, ones that I find cynical and amoral, which I consider to be a form of immoral. The point about a simulacrum is that there is nothing behind it.

What I attempt in this chapter is to thread my way among some of the movements which led many over the precipice into postmodernist cynicism while trying to retain at the end a sense of the point of carrying on with poor old human nature at a time which recalls a lament of Emma Goldman (after whom my second daughter is named). "Poor human nature, what horrible crimes have been committed in thy name!," she lamented. "Every fool, from king to politician, from flathead parson to the visionless dabbler in science, presumes to speak authoritatively of human nature [and the] greater the mental charlatan, the more definite his insistence on the wickedness and weakness of human nature. Yet, how can anyone speak of it today, with every soul in prison, with every heart fettered, wounded and maimed?' (Goldman, 1969, pp. 61-62).

The reason why human nature has had such a bad press of late is that it is thought of as an essence and associated with the discredited idea of humanism, another old friend that I’m loath to jettison. Critics of humanism come from a number of directions. The one relevant to postmodernism insists on the subordination of the subject to economic structures, codes and regulating forces (modes of production, kinship systems, the Unconscious, etc. Or they attempt to deconstruct the very idea of human meaning prior to the discourses and cultural systems it is supposed to explain (Soper in Urmson & Rée, 1989, p. 138).

An older version of humanism held that humanity could be set off from the rest of nature and accorded priority, so that human products were not amenable to the objective and reductive explanations of natural science (ibid.). I think the path from the critique of the claim to human uniqueness to deconstruction needs careful scrutiny, because I think that somewhere along that path they threw the baby out with the bath water.

Think about it. In the pre-Darwin, pre-Marx and pre-Freud scheme of things, human history ruled supreme in placing humanity at the centre of the history of the world. Our species was specially created. Even those who granted a long span of geological time still wanted to set humanity off from the gradualism of uniformitarian explanations of the history of the earth and life, which required the action of present causes in their present intensities to explain how anything came to be. The date 4004 BC for the creation had long-since been discredited, when sophisticated people, for example, Darwin’s mentor, Charles Lyell, still held out for a special status for man, just as Darwin’s co-discoverer of the theory of evolution by natural selection, Alfred Russell Wallace, wanted to exempt the human brain from evolutionary continuity.

Similarly, many Marxists got into awful tangles over whether or not the categories applied to humanity could retain an important subjective element, as in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 (Marx, 1844; precious to the Frankfurt School and the early Lukács - see Jay, 1973; Lukács, 1971). Another Marxist tendency wanted to insert the dialectic into the heart of nature and generate Marxist science, which led to the absurdities of Lysenkoism and Stalinist linguistics. Still another group tried to marry Marxism to nineteenth-century positivism in the positivistic scientism of the Second International. A later group wished to make Marxism a part of the structuralist project (Clarke, et al., 1980). All of these scientistic versions of Marxism had a tough time squaring their historical determinism with the voluntarism of a revolutionary party (see Young, 1995). Those who concentrated on human nature also got into awful tangles, some arguing that Marxism had no psychology and certainly no concept of human nature, while others claimed that there is an instinct for negativity, refusal and rebellion at the heart of human nature, guaranteeing that we will not lie down for tyranny and will not become one-dimensional (Marcuse, 1955, 1964)

It would be easy for me to go on in detail with many, many versions of Darwinism, Marxism and Freudianism that moved from treating human nature as something utterly special to something that deeply immersed it into a determinist framework that left nothing to hope and morality. In the psychoanalytic realm, the ego psychologists and Frank Sulloway (1979) attempted to give us a psychoanalysis that was expressed in terms of energies, forces, structures, adaptations and a biology of the mind. Similar things have occurred among Darwinians at the hands of sociobiologists and Richard Dawkins, whose naughty schoolboy pranks include calling cultural movements and religions ‘viruses’ and talking in terms of creating a vaccine against these forms of irrationalism (Dawkins, 1994).

The next step from triumphalist reductionism is relativism and the slogan ‘anything goes’. One way of summarizing the move from humanism-as-exception to determinist and then structuralist and then deconstructionist anti-humanism is to say that in assiduously dismantling human presumption, the process led to an exhaustive explication of determinations to the point that the result was without remainder. Once one reaches that point, any claim to a container that might appropriately hold something still worth calling human nature began to look like mysticism or even modernism.

Well, I suppose I have to call for one cheer for modernism. At least for modernism humanity was still a project. One of the most poignant things that great and recently deceased radical, Christopher Lasch, said was that too many young people these days are ‘without project’. I am a believer in social constructivism in the history, philosophy and social studies of science. I suppose some would say that I am one of its pioneers in the exploration of the idea that nature is a societal category and that ‘truth is made, not found’, insofar as these ways of thinking have been applied in the biological and human sciences (Young, 1971, 1973, 1973a, 1977, 1979). But I never intended that the specifications of the contingencies of bodies of scientific research and the quite precise investigation of the historicity of ideas of nature and second nature would be taken to the point of dissolving them away. The burgeoning new academic discipline of cultural studies is the final culprit here. It is in danger of becoming a universal solvent. The problem - a logical one - about universal solvents is that they dissolve everything so nothing can contain them.

When I think of the mess we have got into in losing our grip on concepts like the subject and human nature, I am reminded of Alfred North Whitehead’s concept of ‘the fallacy of misplaced concreteness’ (Whitehead, 1926). He applied it to the scientific scheme of the seventeenth century, in particular to mind-body dualism and the associated doctrine of primary and secondary qualities. He pointed out that they led to well-known philosophical absurdities, for example, that as a consequence of placing primary qualities in nature and secondary ones in our mind, sounds could not belong to the birds and colours could not belong to the flowers. "Thus, nature gets credit which should in truth be reserved for ourselves: the rose for its scent: the nightingale for his song; and the sun for his radiance." (p. 69). Only matter and motion are in nature; secondary qualities could emanate solely from human brains, as the Cartesians would have it. His point in mounting a critique of the fundamental assumptions of modern philosophy is that we take thought in order to enhance our understanding and appreciation of things. If our systems of abstractions turn out to impoverish our experience and to take us away from enhanced civility and aesthetic celebration, then away with them. Whitehead was silent about the economic, social and ideological reasons why it turns out not to be so easy to break away from a reifying metaphysics. He was not a student of ideology as a material force. But he was an excellent diagnostician of the internal inconsistencies in the dualistic scientific world-view.

Edwin Arthur Burtt was another, and he was eloquent about how the new philosophy, designed by and for mathematicians, stored up terrible problems for the understanding of human nature. He points out that the paradigm of explanation of modern science leads to a mess whenever you try to apply it outside its original context of the exact mathematical treatment of physical processes. When "they sweep out of the temporal and spatial realm all non-mathematical characteristics, concentrate them in a lobe of the brain, and pronounce the semi-real effects of atomic motions outside, they have performed a rather radical piece of cosmic surgery which deserves to be carefully examined' (Burtt, 1932, p. 202). A high price was paid for modern physical explanation:

To get ahead confidently with their revolutionary achievements, they had to attribute absolute reality and independence to those entities in terms of which they were attempting to reduce the world. This once done, all the other features of their cosmology followed as naturally as you please. It has, no doubt, been worth the metaphysical barbarism of a few centuries to possess modern science' (p. 303).

Having shown why they created a mess, Burtt turns to the consequences for the study of mind: ‘But when it comes to the question of replacing this impossible doctrine by a positive theory of mind, there has been a radical diversity of opinion and a philosophy which will be fair to all the data and meet all the basic needs clamouring to guide their interpretation is yet to be invented' (p. 318). He mentions two approaches. The first seeks to know mind as an object of scientific study according to the canons of scientific research. It is first necessary to jettison the mind-body dualism and treat what was formerly considered to be mental as something bodily, i.e., materialist reductionism. The other alternative is to keep mind special and separate — idealism. Butt thought it a "strange perversity in these Newtonian scientists to further their conquest of external nature everything refractory to exact mathematical handling and thus rendering the latter still more difficult to study scientifically than it had been before

Did it never cross their minds that sooner or later people would appear who craved verifiable knowledge about mind in the same way they craved it about physical events and who might reasonably curse their elder scientific brethren for buying easier success in their own enterprise by throwing extra handicaps in the way of their successors in social science? Apparently not; mind was to them a convenient receptacle for the refuse, the chips and whittlings of science, rather than a possible object of scientific knowledge' (pp. 318-19).

One way of getting out of this sort of tangle is to recall the parable of the centipede, who, when asked which leg he moved first, took thought, and the more he thought, the more his paralysis grew. The intellectual equivalent to breaking that stasis is to turn to everyday lived conceptual frameworks, as P. F. Strawson (1959) did, and look at the descriptive metaphysics of the ordinary philosophy of non-philosophers. They know that the concept of a person is ontologically prior to the two systems of abstractions called mental substances and extended substances - minds and bodies. It is not minds and bodies which interact; it is persons who have thoughts, feelings, sensations and who do things, some of them unconscious and affecting their digestion, hearts, breathing and so on. If our abstractions serve us ill, look at the everyday and practical psychosomatic unity; don’t get hung up on the abstruse philosophical analyses that have been elaborated for trying to understand them.

Everything such critics had to say in the 1920s about Cartesian dualism and the primary-secondary quality distinction applies with extra force when, two generations later, people assiduously applying various versions of scientificity (among the most pernicious a linguistic one) to human nature leave us utterly bereft of a sense of the subject or of any foundations for common humanity or moral discourse. Modes of analysis designed to take us away from essences have left us with nothing - nothing at all. We asked for bread, and they gave us stones. If our analytic tools dissect too small and leave us empty-handed, we need to go back to basics. This is the conclusion some colleagues and I reached at a point in the mid-1970s when we thought we’d become too clever by half at deciding that everyone was no good at meeting the exacting standards we had erected at the interface between subjectivity and critical political theory. Our reading group got so it could toss away in increasingly short order a thick tome with well-honed phrases - vulgar Marxist, Althusserian, idealist, reductionist and so on. So we became like children and started reading Freud, Klein, Winnicott, Bion, Meltzer - straight psychoanalysts whose writings had been influential in our own work settings and had formed the basis of the training of our analysts. What we learned was something about the preconditions for having a mind and being a person. What we learned was object relations and the ubiquity of primitive functioning and the fundamental importance containment.

Orthodox psychoanalysis went to great lengths to express its ideas as much as possible in terms drawn from physics, chemistry and biology (see Rapaport, 1959, 1967 Rapaport and Gill, 1959). In some ways this was understandable and reflected a search for respectability and for a unification with other and more respectable sciences. There was a deeper reason rooted in the conceptual features of Cartesian dualism, as I discussed earlier. If we look closely at the history of psychology we find it replete with analogies drawn from the natural sciences - mental elements, compounds, forces, energies, structures, functions, adaptations. Even the notion of mental distress draws its language so routinely from the somatic that we forget what a strained analogy when we speak of ‘psychopathology.’ With this term implicitly comes a host of assumptions about analogies from medicine: the dichotomy between normal and pathological, the disease/syndrome model, the search for classification that takes us to the appropriateness of a Diagnostic and Statistical Manual in psychiatry, now in its fifth incarnation.

One can interpret the libido theory narrowly or broadly, somatically or symbolically, but its roots lay in a theory of instincts and drives with aims and objects. The emphasis was on getting the instinctual need met. The object was secondary. At the hands of Melanie Klein, Ronald Fairbairn and Donald Winnicott there occurred in the 1930s and beyond a revolution in thinking about these matters. There was a complex interaction among the three of them as their ideas developed, and there are huge differences among them in what they meant by object relations. They also varied in the degree to which they became explicitly anti-biological. Klein paid lip service to biology, Winnicott was largely silent about it, and Fairbairn was explicitly anti-biologistic.

They were united, however, in turning things upside down. The emphasis shifted dramatically and decisively from the aim to the object, from drives to relationships. In orthodox Freudianism the object is merely the vehicle for the instinct on its way to discharge. For Klein, drives are inherently and inseparably directed toward objects (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983, p. 136). We are not embodied energies, full of impulses seeking discharge and using others to get it off. We are human beings seeking to relate to others, both internally and externally (Fairbairn, 1941, p. 34).

I am not concerned here to spell out the nuances of different versions of object relations theory but to reflect on this approach at a different level - that of the implications for how we think about human nature. I want now to reprise two things I said earlier. The first is the fallacy of misplaced concreteness and the remedy of turning to everyday philosophy, using descriptive metaphysics to guide us to the conceptual scheme people really do use when they are not being academic. The second is a remark I made about David Hume overcoming his scepticism by means of an imputed unity based on the association of ideas. I think object relations theory can rescue us from the bleak fragmentation of postmodern deconstruction without remainder by heeding these two philosophical moves.

What the object relations approach in psychoanalysis does is to ask what is going on in the inner world of the patient from moment to moment - the flow of unconscious phantasies occurring in the psychoanalytic session as revealed by all the clues given: the associations, the nuances, sighs, silences, gestures and whatever else one can discern. When one is lost about the transference and doesn’t know what’s going on, there are certain simple rules for rescue one can fall back on: ‘What object am I for this patient now?’ In order to answer this, according to Wilfred Bion, one has to indulge in the mystical discipline of ‘abandoning memory and desire’ to discover whatever it is about the unconscious relationship to internal objects which is determining this person’s unconscious sense of self today – at this moment. According to this approach, there is a constant flow of unconscious processes based at the most primitive level on the riches and horrors of the mother’s body. This level of relating is never transcended, no matter what others come into play.

What this way of thinking has to say to the fragmentation of postmodernist deconstruction is that from birth there is no such thing as an objectless state. There are part objects, damaged objects, good objects, bad objects, transitional objects, bizarre objects (for discussions see Hinshelwood, 1991). There are states where the prevailing mode of mental functioning is to split off unwanted or taboo parts of the self and project them into others or other parts of one’s own mind - states in which splitting and persecution are the norm (called by Klein the ‘paranoid-schizoid position’). These are in tension with states where there is integration, projections can be taken back, where there is concern for others, where guilt can be borne and attempts can be made to make reparation for one’s aggressive thoughts and actions (called by Klein the ‘depressive position’).

We can be in one or the other of these states or positions from moment to moment or for longer, disastrously longer, periods. Whole approaches to life can be characterized by these positions, for example, war and virulent nationalism, domestic conflict and schoolyard bullying, nasty commercial competition and careerism lie in the paranoid-schizoid position, while care, co-operation, mediation, aid, realistic love and related ways of being are in the depressive position. It has always struck me as really sad that the most humanistic notion of relating refers to the object of our affections as ‘objects’ (the opposite of what they are: they are valued - loved and hated - subjects, perceived and imaginatively identified with) and the height of human sympathy and relating as ‘the depressive position’. But there you are.

What psychoanalytic object relations theory has to say to pessimistic cultural theory is that human nature does not have to be thrown out at the end of listing all the determinations that contribute to the causality of our humanity. Object relations theory can accommodate all the fragmentation and breaking up of a coherent idea of self or humanity and make it part of a theory of human nature which holds out some hope of bearing the disintegrative forces in our cultures and societies and finding a basis for reconstruction and reintegration. One area where this can be seen strikingly is in the theory of psychosis, whereby fragmentation of self becomes the norm. People are said to ‘break down’, fall apart, disintegrate, to be ‘in pieces’, to experience ‘nameless dread’ and feel that they are falling through empty space. These are certainly the characteristic subjective experiences of psychotics much of the time (and of all of us from time to time), and those around them certainly testify to the striking incoherence and inappropriateness of their utterances and behaviour.

The other side of the coin is that some of the most sensitive students of psychosis are able to find the meaning in the utterances of schizophrenics and the appropriateness of them to the patients’ experiences. On this argument a link with whole object relations is kept, while the symptoms are acting as a barrier to protect the inner core of object relations from giving up the ghost. I refer again to the records of decades of analysis of schizophrenics and people with borderline disorders movingly described in the work of Harold Searles (1960, 1965, 1979, 1986) and of the sensitive analysis of the humanity of schizophrenics in the work of Peter Barham, who writes about Schizophrenia and Human Value (1988) in such a way as to prove that schizophrenics are far from ‘de-mented’. His work is designed to find a path between extreme definitions of normality and ways of keeping the schizophrenic as a member of the community - a person in distress rather than someone who is assumed to be utterly incompetent at the business of living and thereby not a person at all (Barham, 1992; Barham and Hayward, 1991).

A related approach to extreme mental distress is to think of the mind as consisting of dramatis personae, dominated by a bully or a gang leader (Rosenfeld, 1971, p. 249) or a cohabitee (Richards, 1993; Sinason, 1993), whose voice holds the healthy parts of the mind prisoner or in the thrall of a perverse and destructive narcissism. This approach represents the psychological difficulty as a ‘pathological organisation’ (Spillius, 1988, vol. 1, Part 4), a name which conveys to me both a structure and a sort of mental institution in the mind - a crazy place - where people are kept mad by destructive forces. Once again, this is a characteristic state for people living in this sort of ‘psychic retreat’ (Steiner, 1994). This stuck position occurs some of the time in all patients. As Searles puts it, ‘I became convinced, long ago, that borderline phenomena will be encountered in and deep-reaching course of psychoanalysis or intensive psychoanalytic therapy, for these phenomena are part of the general human condition’ (Searles, 1986, p. xii).

My aim in taking us through aspects of object relations theory is to point out that when faced with incoherence from too exhaustive a set of reductive explanations or from despair at the alienation of postmodern life, one need not throw in the towel. There are ways of thinking of the end point of deconstructions that are not inhuman and ways of thinking about fragmentation that do not give way to it but are nevertheless honest about how bad things get in the outer and inner worlds. To be human is to have perpetually ongoing object relations, however painful and fraught, and to have object relations is to partake of a recognizably shared human nature - ‘human’ in having interpersonal relationships which are not reducible to a pre-symbolic or purely animal set of interactions and ‘nature’ in the sense that there is no denial of our link to our biological origins and the social, political and economic determinations at work in our lives.

I have two other things to say - both rather old fashioned and both dear to my heart. The first is that the object relations version of the rites of passage that make up maturation - becoming a responsible adult - appeal to me enormously. They give back a hook on which to hang matters that the gleefully iconoclastic side of scientific and postmodernist reductionists and deconstructionists has seemed on the point of making irredeemable fuddy-duddy. I mean morality, responsibility, altruism, self-knowledge and character. Kleinian object relations theorists have reconceptualized the developmental scheme of the libido theory and translated it from biologistic to humanistic terms.

I like this very much. It is particularly helpful for how we think about the Oedipal relationship, which was awfully sexually and aggressively reductionist in the classsical Freudian account. The Kleinians have not only put it into terms of the values inherent in good relationships; they have also thrown away the strict chronology and argue that we are faced with what they call ‘the Oedipal situation’ at every important point of crisis and every serious moral dilemma in life. I was so tired of getting knowing and patronising smiles from smartypants scientists and pomos whenever I said that something was right or wrong or that someone was a person of good character or that doing something would be the generous thing to do. I was told that I was a fundamentalist; indeed, I was brought up as one and am glad to find a new basis for what was not rigid and moralistic in those old values (see Young, 1994).

I spell out this point of view on the Oedipal situation in some detail in chapter six, so I only sketch it here. The internal state of mind in the Oedipus complex and the Oedipal situation is one of splits, persecution and part objects, and its resolution, if development proceeds satisfactorily, takes one to a state of healed splits, integration and taking back of projections - the depressive position. As David Bell puts it, “The capacity to represent internally the loving intercourse between the parents as whole objects results, through the ensuing identifications, in the capacity for full genital maturity. For Klein, the resolution of the Oedipus complex and the achievement of the depressive position refer to the same phenomena viewed from different perspectives' (Bell, 1992, p.172). Kleinians also see 'the depressive position and the Oedipus situation as never finished but as having to be re-worked in each new life situation, at each stage of development, and with each major addition to experience or knowledge' (Britton, 1992, p. 38). Freed from the restraints of the biologism of the libido theory, this approach also allows psychoanalysts to think more clearly about insight and that precious gift we prayed as children for God to give us - to ‘see ourselves as others see us’. I quote again a passage by Ron Britton since I find it so moving and such a testament to the fruits of thinking in object relations terms:

If the link between the parents perceived in love and hate can be tolerated in the child's mind, it provides him with a prototype for an object relationship of a third kind in which he is a witness and not a participant . . .This provides us with a capacity for seeing ourselves in interaction with others and for entertaining another point of view whilst retaining our own, for reflecting on ourselves whilst being ourselves' (Britton, 1989, p. 87).

I find this very helpful, indeed. It provides the psychoanalytic key to notions of self-knowledge, altruism, fairness and generosity - all precious attributes in danger of being abrogated by those reductionists and relativists. This version of development gives me back aspects of human nature for which the scientific world- view and the temptation to give way to fragmentation that is characteristic of postmodernism cannot sustain. Armed with these good ole concepts, I am ready for two more frays. The first is to have an answer for those who say that moving off the libido theory means ‘anything goes’ with respect to gender identity and sexual behaviour. The object relations answer is to look at the underlying unconscious phantasy and assess whether it is a loving or perverse one.

The second and related fray, which I shall enter in the penultimate chapter, is to have a set of criteria for fending off the gleeful advocates of designer genes who would open a supermarket of genetic engineering, arguing that people can in the long run be designed like Leggo or what used to be called Erector Sets, using bits stuck together to suit the consumer. I know this is a loose way of speaking. I also know that we are not in possession of social processes for handling the new technologies that take our existing Promethian penchant for interfering with evolution by natural selection to a dramatically new level. I am truly appalled at the powers that are being dropped into a culture so unsure of its concept of humanity, with priorities so dreadfully skewed by commercial, career and, in some cases, decadent values. It behoves us to get hold of a clear sense of what we intend that humanity shall mean. I am glad the object relations theory is available as a touchstone grounded in an essentially moral vision of human nature.

In conclusion, I want to recall an observation made by Jürgen Habermas, a noted philosopher from the second generation of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, "Psychoanalysis," he wrote, "is relevant to us as the only tangible example of a science incorporating methodical self-reflection.

The birth of psychoanalysis opens up the possibility of arriving at the dimension that positivism closed off, and of doing so in a methodological manner that arises out of the logic of enquiry. This possibility has remained unrealized. For the scientific self-misunderstanding of psychoanalysis inaugurated by Freud himself, as the physiologist he originally was, sealed off this possibility’ (Habermas, 1972, p. 214).

What I have been suggesting is that the hopes for a truly reflexive science expressed here by Habermas may now be realizable as a result of the re-conceptualisation of psychoanalysis in object relations terms. I am not alone in trying to achieve some accommodation between psychoanalysis, on the one hand, and revived forms of radicalism refracted through experiences since the 1960s, on the other, in the face of the despair brought on by some renderings of postmodernism. I can think of a number of people who are doing work within this area that I find congenial, for example, Joel Kovel (1988, 1991), Stephen Frosh (1989, 1991, 1994), Michael Rustin (1991), Paul Hoggett (1992), Anthony Elliott (1992, 1993, 1994), Jacqueline Rose (1993), Victor Wolfenstein (1993), Nancy Chodorow (1994) and Barry Richards (1994).

The psychological and moral unity of a credible concept of human nature, which has been subverted by scientism (Freud’s and more recent versions) as well as by deconstructionism, is gaining a new lease on life. Human nature grounded in object relations is also a rendering of humanity that will not dissolve when immersed in secularism, scientism or pessimism. I shall close with an expression of the issues by Stephen Frosh that I find particularly apt:

The opposition... is between those who celebrate the dissolution of the self and those who mourn it; correlatively, it is between those who see the contemporary denial of order and integrity as a method of disavowing the ideological constraints of bourgeois society, and those who see it as a despairing abrogation of the responsibility for resistance in the face of the explosive power of modern patterns of domination’ (Frosh, 1991, p. 189).

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1. \* Originally publshed in *Ethical Record* 100, 1 (1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)