

# Guide to Psychoanalytic Developmental Theories

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*To the students, graduates, and faculty of the  
Chicago Institute for Clinical Social Work*

*JP*

*To the memory of  
Paul Stein & Morris Sklansky  
my teachers and mentors  
whose influence endures*

*HB*

*To Jennifer, Kelsey, and Carly*

*BK*

# Preface

This work was an outgrowth of our frustration as teachers. With the receding interest in psychoanalysis during the past two decades, we found ourselves having to provide remedial materials to students to fill in the gaps in their knowledge of psychoanalytic theory. In addition, we felt that their unfamiliarity with the history of the psychoanalytic movement limited their ability to appreciate the context in which the creative ferment of the first half of the twentieth century occurred.

It seemed to us, as clinicians, that a good place to start would be to introduce readers to developmental theories, given that a foundational concept of psychoanalysis is that an understanding of psychopathology requires a developmental framework. Providing students with this background, we felt, would enhance their development as clinicians.

The authors we have chosen to include in this book represent those whose contributions have gained wide recognition in psychoanalytic circles and whose works encompass aspects of the life cycle. Not every author provides a description either of the same phenomena or of the same life stages. Some are more inclusive whereas others are more selective. In one instance, that of Heinz Hartmann, we found it necessary to include his work not because he proposed a theory of development, but because of the influence of his reformulation of metapsychology on those who subsequently proposed their own developmental theories. We sought to cover the broad trends through which psychoanalysis evolved and selected those authors whose work seemed representative of that trend. The sections into which we divided the book represent our view of those major trends.

The sections on Drive Theory, Ego Psychological Theories, Object Relations Theories, and Interpersonal Theory seemed to us uncontroversial, although some may disagree with the inclusion of a specific author under one or the other of those headings. The theories of Erikson, Stern, and Kohut present challenges in that they do not fit comfortably under any of the preceding headings. Interestingly, in their work, Greenberg and Mitchell (1983) make no mention of Erikson or Stern, and consider Kohut to subscribe to a mixed drive and object relations model. Since Erikson extended ego psychology far beyond its original boundaries and was the first to present a model that encompassed the entire life cycle, we decided to devote an entire section to his work. The commonalities between Stern and Kohut are more superficial than profound. At the superficial level, each moved away from the concept of the ego

and replaced it with their own versions of the concept of self. At a deeper level, their innovations had profound theoretical implications for these authors.

Finally, we introduce Attachment Theory under its own section for a variety of reasons. The initial rejection of Bowlby's theory by psychoanalysis set his theory apart from the mainstream. By the time psychoanalytic circles began to take notice of his contributions, attachment theory had undergone a significant transformation. Developmental psychologists had accumulated a large body of evidence in support of its categories of attachment and had made linkages between Bowlby's concept of Internal Working Models and the traditional psychoanalytic concepts of mental representations. In addition, a bridge to psychoanalysis was being built on the foundations of the emerging discoveries in the neurosciences.

The theoretical background of each developmental theory seemed insufficient to us to provide a full picture of the context in which the theories emerged, as few of our students were aware of the spirit of discovery that excited the early contributors under Freud's tutelage. We decided, therefore, to introduce each chapter with a biographical note on the author of the theory.

As we undertook that task, we faced the dilemmas of how to balance the amount of historical information we provide with the theoretical summaries that needed to be included. The richness of the early history of psychoanalysis could hardly be condensed in a few paragraphs. We consequently decided that where possible we would err on the side of length over that of brevity in the biographical materials. Readers will note the uneven amount of space devoted to each author's biographical information. The section on Sigmund Freud is the longest for obvious reasons, since he is the fountainhead from whom all subsequent theories sprang. A considerable amount of information exists in the case of some authors, such as Anna Freud, Margaret Mahler, Melanie Klein, Erik Erikson, and Heinz Kohut, each of whom has at least one biographical volume dedicated to a description of their life and work. The challenge we faced was that of summarizing and extracting the relevant material from what was available. In contrast, we had great difficulty in obtaining biographical information on Otto Kernberg, Daniel Stern, and Peter Fonagy. For these, we could only give what was publicly available, which sheds little light on the life history of the contributor.

A second dilemma we faced had to do with the necessity to include broader aspects of an author's theoretical framework. Our fear was that without this background, students would not fully appreciate the implications for developmental theory and therefore major issues would remain obscure. We decided that where applicable we would include a section on the author's broader theoretical contribution. In our efforts to accomplish this goal, we ran into the secondary problem that some major contributors, such as Hartmann and Kohut, did not formulate developmental theories. Yet it seemed imperative to include their work as without that information students' understanding of such major paradigms such as ego psychology, object relations theory, and self psychology would be incomplete. We resolved this dilemma by offering summaries of the theoretical frameworks of such authors and, where possible, we inferred from their theories the structure of a possible developmental theory that would be consistent with their work.

As for the theories of development themselves, we discovered that there is no consensus among psychoanalysts as to what constitutes a comprehensive developmental theory. There is no consensus as to the methodology to employ in data collection or of the components necessary for such a theory to explain adequately those data. Most authors have followed Freud's example, often modeling their theories on his methodology and addressing the issues he considered essential.

In the Preface of the first volume to their comprehensive seven-volume edited work on *The Course of Life* (Greenspan & Pollock, 1989), Greenspan and Pollock state:

Psychoanalytic developmental psychology is one of the basic foundations for our understanding of how the mind works, how it is organized in its adaptive and pathologic configurations, and how psychological treatment can be used to foster adaptive development. As an in-depth psychology, it provides special insights into man's emotional life, including subtleties of wishes, feelings, thought, and experiences that influence behavior and are ordinarily outside of awareness (the dynamic unconscious). Psychoanalytic developmental psychology also can be viewed as being the basis for a general developmental psychology, embodying a comprehensive approach to understanding the multiple lines of human development from infancy through the stages of adulthood (Vol. 1; p. vii.).

In this work, we made no attempt to propose a definition of what should constitute a developmental theory, although in our Introduction we identify some of the methodological perspectives that theorists have used historically and some of the questions that these authors have posed in their efforts to construct their theories.

We had a concern that our descriptions of the authors' theories were too theoretical and abstract. We thought that it would probably have been helpful to readers to have clinical illustrations of each of the major constructs contained within the theories. However, on further consideration, we decided that to include such examples would nearly double the length of the book. The idea was unworkable. Instead, we tried assiduously to translate into plain English each major concept and rely on the reader to pursue the literature for further illustrations of the clinical applicability of those constructs.

Furthermore, we thought it would enhance students' understanding of the developmental frameworks if we were to provide a clinical example taken from the author's own work. When available, we provide such a clinical example at the end of each chapter. However, to our surprise, we were unable to find published case materials by several major authors, as in the case with Heinz Hartmann, Eric Erikson, Daniel Stern, and John Bowlby. Our extensive searches of the literature failed to turn up such illustrations. Since we did not want to take examples from followers of those authors, we decided to include a relevant excerpt from their work that typified their thoughts on an aspect of their developmental theory. In those cases, we have titled the section *In His/Her Own Words*.

In the course of reading our chapters, readers will encounter words or phrases that are typed in bold. We highlight these words or phrases to draw attention to them as keywords that are central to an understanding of an aspect of the theory. These words are listed at the end of each chapter and may serve students as guides for further exploration of the theory's content.

The structure of each chapter is as follows: Biographical Information, Conceptual Framework (where applicable), Theory of Developmental, Case Illustration or In His/Her Own Words (an excerpt from the author's work), Summary and Conclusion, Keywords, References, Major Works, and Supplementary Readings.

We realize that some of our readers would not be reading the entire work sequentially. Therefore, we attempted to make each chapter as self-sufficient and comprehensible on its own as possible. This meant that in some instances materials had to be repeated; however, we have attempted to keep these repetitions to a minimum.

Readers may be struck by the mismatch between some of the normal or pathological behaviors that some authors attribute to children and adolescents during particular phases or stages of development. These are in contrast to the behavior we conventionally expect nowadays of children and adolescents. What was once considered normative and typical has changed considerably over time. In our descriptions, we made no efforts to modify the authors' original examples, but attempted to render their own work as accurately as we could. We leave it to our readers to evaluate each developmental theory.

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# Contents

<b>Preface</b> .....	vii
<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	xi
<b>Introduction</b> .....	xxvii
<b>Section I Drive Theory</b>	
<b>1 Sigmund Freud (1856–1939)</b> .....	3
<i>Publishing Era (1888–1950)</i>	
Biographical Information.....	3
Laboratory Research, Military Service and Medicine .....	3
Jean Martin Charcot and Josef Breuer .....	4
Martha Bernays .....	4
Wilhelm Fliess: The Project, Freud’s Self-Analysis, and The Cocaine Episode.....	4
Professorship and Relocation .....	6
Study Groups.....	6
Visit to America .....	6
The Committee .....	7
Karl Abraham (1877–1925) .....	7
The First World War and The Emergence of The Death Instinct.....	9
Psychoanalysis of Anna (1895–1982).....	10
Cancer.....	10
The Goethe Prize and The Final Years.....	11
Conceptual Framework .....	11
Freud’s Metapsychological Framework .....	13
Theory of Development .....	24
The Psychosexual Framework.....	24
Case Illustration: Little Hans .....	33
Introduction .....	34
The Analysis of Hans’ Phobia.....	34
Discussion .....	37

Summary and Conclusion .....	37
Keywords.....	39
References.....	39
Major Works (S. Freud and K. Abraham).....	44
Supplementary Readings .....	45
 <b>Section II Ego Psychological Theories</b>	
<b>2 Heinz Hartmann (1894–1970).....</b>	<b>49</b>
<i>Publishing Era (1917–1966)</i>	
Biographical Information.....	49
Conceptual Framework .....	51
The Ego Reconceptualized.....	53
Primary and Secondary Autonomous Ego Functions .....	53
Ego Defenses.....	54
Adaptation and Accommodation.....	55
Ego-Syntonic and Ego-Dystonic Responses .....	55
In His Own Words.....	55
Summary and Conclusion .....	58
Keywords.....	59
References .....	59
Major Works .....	60
Supplementary Readings .....	60
 <b>3 Anna Freud (1895–1982).....</b>	<b>61</b>
<i>Publishing Era (1922–1982)</i>	
Biographical Information.....	61
Teacher and Psychoanalyst.....	62
Child Analysis .....	63
The Emergence of Ego Psychology and Sigmund Freud’s Death.....	64
The War Nurseries.....	64
The Controversial Discussions .....	65
The Productive Years.....	66
Her Legacy .....	67
Theory of Development .....	67
Defense Mechanisms.....	70
On Adolescence.....	71
Diagnostic Profile.....	74
Case Illustration .....	77
Summary and Conclusions .....	78
Keywords.....	78
References.....	79
Supplementary Readings .....	80

<b>4</b>	<b>Rene Spitz (1887–1974)</b> .....	81
	<i>Publishing Era (1945–1974)</i>	
	Biographical Information.....	81
	The Importance of Infant Observation .....	81
	“Hospitalism” and Anaclitic Depression.....	82
	Theory of Development .....	83
	The Objectless Stage (Birth to 10–12 Weeks).....	85
	The Establishment of the Libidinal Object (3 Months to 12–15 Months).....	86
	The Beginning of Human Communication (from 15 Months on) .....	87
	Case Illustration .....	90
	Summary and Conclusion .....	91
	Keywords.....	92
	References .....	92
	Major Works .....	93
	Supplementary Readings .....	94
<b>5</b>	<b>Peter Blos (1904–1997)</b> .....	95
	<i>Publishing Era (1941–1998)</i>	
	Biographical Information.....	95
	Theory of Development .....	97
	Latency: 7–11 Years .....	100
	Preadolescence: 11–13 Years .....	100
	Adolescence: The Second Individuation Process: 13–18 Years.....	102
	Case Illustration .....	105
	Summary and Conclusions .....	109
	Keywords.....	109
	References .....	109
	Major Works .....	110
	Supplementary Readings .....	111
<b>6</b>	<b>Greenspan (1941–)</b> .....	113
	<i>Publishing Era: 1972 to the Present</i>	
	Biographical Information.....	113
	Theory of Development .....	115
	Emotions as Architects of the Mind.....	117
	The Six Stages of Functional/Emotional Development .....	118
	Case Illustration .....	122
	Interview.....	122
	Comments [Greenspan Continues].....	123
	Summary and Conclusions .....	123
	Keywords.....	124

References.....	124
Major Works .....	125

### Section III Object Relations Theories

<b>7 Melanie Klein (1882–1960).....</b>	<b>129</b>
<i>Publishing Era (1923–1960)</i>	
Biographical Information.....	129
Theory of Development .....	132
Paranoid-Schizoid Position: 0 to 3–4 Months.....	134
Depressive Position: 3–4 to 6 Months.....	135
Depressive Position: 6 Months to 12 Months .....	137
Depressive Position: 12–24 Months.....	138
Case Illustration .....	138
Ninety-Second Session.....	139
Notes to Ninety-Second Session .....	141
Summary and Conclusions .....	142
Keywords.....	143
References.....	143
Major Works .....	144
Supplementary Readings .....	145
 <b>8 Donald Winnicott (1896–1971) .....</b>	 <b>147</b>
<i>Publishing Era (1931–1971)</i>	
Biographical Information.....	147
Theory of Development .....	149
Phase of Absolute Dependence.....	150
Phase of Relative Dependence .....	152
Toward Independence.....	154
Case Illustration .....	154
Summary and Conclusions .....	159
Keywords.....	160
References.....	160
Major Works .....	161
Supplementary Readings .....	162
 <b>9 Margaret Mahler (1897–1985).....</b>	 <b>163</b>
<i>Publishing Era (1938–1980)</i>	
Biographical Information.....	163
Vienna.....	165
New York.....	166
Theory of Development .....	168
Forerunners of the Separation–Individuation Process .....	169

Separation–Individuation Proper: 5–36 Months and Beyond.....	171
Beginnings of Emotional Self- and Object-Constancy:	
24–36 Months and Beyond .....	174
Case Illustration .....	175
Background .....	175
Summary and Conclusions.....	177
Keywords .....	178
References .....	178
Major Works.....	179
Supplementary Readings.....	180
<b>10 Otto F. Kernberg (1928–).....</b>	<b>181</b>
<i>Publishing Era: 1963 to the present</i>	
Biographical Information.....	181
Conceptual Framework .....	182
Theory of Development .....	185
Normal Development.....	185
Abnormal Development.....	187
Case Illustration .....	189
Summary and Conclusions.....	192
Keywords .....	193
References .....	194
Major Works.....	194
Supplementary Readings.....	196
<b>Section IV Life Cycle Theory</b>	
<b>11 Erik Erikson (1902–1994).....</b>	<b>199</b>
<i>Publishing Era (1937–1980)</i>	
Biographical Information.....	199
The Vienna Period (1927–1933): Erik Homburger.....	201
The American Period (1933–1994): Erik H. Erikson .....	202
Theory of Development .....	207
The Eight Ages of Man.....	210
Case Illustration .....	219
Summary and Conclusions.....	222
Keywords .....	223
References .....	223
Major Works.....	224
Supplementary Readings.....	224

## Section V Interpersonal Theory

<b>12 Harry Stack Sullivan (1892–1949)</b> .....	227
<i>Publishing Era (1925–1947)</i>	
Biographical Information.....	227
Theory of Development .....	229
The Self-System.....	229
Developmental Epochs .....	232
Case Illustration .....	238
Summary and Conclusions.....	239
Keywords .....	239
References .....	240
Major Works.....	240
Supplementary Readings.....	240

## Section VI Theories of the Self

<b>13 Daniel Stern (1934–)</b> .....	243
<i>Publishing Era: 1963 to the present</i>	
Biographical Information.....	243
Academic Training.....	243
Teaching .....	244
Publications.....	244
The Boston Change Process Study Group.....	244
Theory of Development .....	246
Domain I: The Domain of the Emergent Self: 0–2 Months.....	247
Domain II: The Core Sense of Self: 2–7 Months .....	248
Domain III: The Subjective Sense of Self: 7–15 Months .....	250
Domain IV: The Verbal Sense of Self: 15–30 Months .....	251
Domain V: The Narrative Sense of Self: 30–48 Months .....	252
Case Illustration .....	252
Summary and Conclusions.....	254
Keywords .....	255
References .....	255
Major Works.....	256
Supplementary Readings.....	256
<b>14 Heinz Kohut (1913–1981)</b> .....	257
<i>Publishing Era (1950–1984)</i>	
Biographical Information.....	257
Chicago .....	259
Mr. Psychoanalysis .....	260
The New Paradigm.....	261
Theory of Development .....	262

The Concept of Self .....	263
The Development of the Bipolar Self .....	263
Case Illustration .....	276
Summary and Conclusions.....	278
Keywords .....	279
References .....	279
Major Works.....	280
Supplementary Readings.....	281

## Section VII Attachment Theories

### Part 1: Traditional Attachment Theories

<b>15 John Bowlby (1907–1990)</b> .....	287
<i>Publishing Era (1952–1990)</i>	
Biographical Information.....	287
The Tavistock Years .....	288
Exclusion from the Psychoanalytic Community .....	288
Darwin Biography.....	290
Theory of Development .....	291
Ethological/Evolutionary Approach .....	292
Attachment.....	296
In His Own Words.....	297
Summary and Conclusions.....	299
Keywords .....	300
References .....	300
Major Works.....	301
Supplementary Readings.....	301
 <b>16 Mary Salter Ainsworth (1913–1999)</b> .....	303
<i>Publishing Era (1951–1999)</i>	
Biographical Information.....	303
Theoretical Contributions.....	304
Attachment Classification .....	304
Main's Contributions to Attachment Theory .....	307
Disorganized/Disoriented Attachments .....	307
The Adult Attachment Interview .....	308
Ainsworth's Theory of Development.....	310
In Her Own Words .....	311
Relationship Between Strange-Situation Behavior and Maternal Behavior.....	311
Summary and Conclusions.....	313
Keywords .....	313
References .....	314

Major Works.....	314
Supplementary Reading .....	314
 <b>Part 2: Neurodevelopmental Attachment Theories: The Return to Psychoanalysis</b>	
<b>17 Allen N. Schore (1943–) .....</b>	<b>319</b>
<i>Publishing Era: 1991 to the Present</i>	
Biographical Information.....	319
Theory of Development .....	322
The Neurobiology of Secure Attachments.....	323
The Rupture and Repair Sequence.....	323
Internal Working Models .....	324
Schore on Attachment Theory .....	324
Attachment Redefined as a Regulatory System .....	325
Psychoneurobiological Development .....	326
The Orbital Frontal Region .....	327
The Limbic System .....	328
The Neurobiology of Insecure Attachments .....	328
In His Own Words.....	329
Interactive Affect Regulation: A Fundamental Mechanism of Attachment Dynamics.....	329
Summary and Conclusions.....	331
Keywords .....	332
References .....	332
Major Works.....	333
 <b>18 Peter Fonagy (1952–) .....</b>	 <b>335</b>
<i>Publishing Era: 1984 to the Present</i>	
Biographical Information.....	335
Conceptual Framework .....	336
Attachment Theory and Psychoanalytic Theory.....	337
Internal Working Models .....	338
Theory of Development .....	339
Development of the Self .....	340
Case Illustration .....	342
Summary and Conclusions.....	345
Keywords .....	346
References .....	346
Major Works.....	347

<b>19 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>349</b>
Intellectual Underpinning of Psychoanalytic	
Developmental Theories .....	349
The Positivist Perspective .....	351
The Postmodern Worldview.....	353
What the Future Holds .....	357
Neuroscience and Psychoanalysis.....	358
Neuropsychanalysis: A New Paradigm.....	358
Strategies for the Integration of Neurobiology and Psychoanalysis .....	360
The View Beyond the Horizon.....	362
Keywords .....	363
References .....	363
<b>Appendix A .....</b>	<b>369</b>
<b>Appendix B .....</b>	<b>373</b>
<b>Appendix C .....</b>	<b>395</b>
<b>Name Index.....</b>	<b>397</b>
<b>Subject Index.....</b>	<b>403</b>

# Introduction

In this work, we summarize the major psychoanalytic developmental theories that have evolved since Freud's early formulations. We decided to set each theory within the historical context in which its author created it by providing a biographical glimpse of the author's own life. Much as Freud's self-analysis was pivotal to his "discovery" of the oedipal conflict, each author's personal history contributed to the theory he or she originated. We also emphasize that the historical continuity of each successive edition of a theory reflects an evolutionary process in which each author took cognizance of the modifications of psychoanalytic metapsychology and the intellectual trends that existed at the time of the formulation of his or her developmental theory.

In this introduction, we provide our readers with some reflections and a set of perspectives through which to evaluate each of these theories without unduly biasing these evaluations. We present our thoughts in the following three sections: the first section is titled *Freud as Fountainhead*; the second section is *Models of Development*, and the third section is *Paradigms and Developmental Theories*.

In the first section, *Freud as Fountainhead*, we begin with a brief overview of the principles that guided Freud in the articulation of his developmental theory. We review the issues of his methodology and the legacy he bequeathed to those of his followers who attempted to produce developmental theories. In the second section on *Models of Development*, we take a broader perspective to the assessment of developmental theories. We begin with a consideration of the methodological issues that the authors of such theories encounter and some of the questions that require answers in the formulation of a theory. We then offer the criterion of narrative coherence and completeness as a standard by which to compare the different theories.

The last section, on *Paradigms and Developmental Theories*, deals with a set of more abstract issues, one that many authors do not address directly but that is of critical importance in enunciating the philosophical presuppositions that undergird each theory. The central concern these issues address is the question: Are developmental theories *paradigms* formulated in accordance with scientific principles or are they socially constructed *stories* that reflect the social and cultural milieu in which the author formulated the theory? A discussion of this issue is

of critical importance given that currently a serious controversy exists among psychoanalytic theorists.

## Freud as Fountainhead

Freud represents the fountainhead from which most subsequent psychoanalytic developmental theories have flowed, many of which we include in this work. Every theory we consider begins either by agreeing or by disagreeing with Freud's metapsychological assumptions and his methodology. Psychoanalytic practitioners generally agree with the principle established by Freud that developmental theories play a central role in understanding typical and pathological human conduct. These theories provide a conceptual framework for the relationship between past occurrences, present personality structure, and psychopathology. In addition, they are integral to the conduct of clinical practice because psychoanalytic clinical theories subscribe to the *principle of developmental psychopathology*, that is, that all psychopathology can be understood either as reflective of what occurred during development or as a return to an earlier developmental phase. These theories embrace the notion that a *tight linkage* should exist between a developmental theory, its theory of psychopathology, and its clinical theory (see Palombo, 1991a, 1991b).

## Freud's Methodology

From a methodological perspective, there is no evidence that Freud conducted systematic observations on his or other children to collect data upon which to construct his theory of development. Three assumptions guided his thinking. The *first assumption* is that **ontogeny** recapitulates **phylogeny**, an assumption to which he referred as the existence of "archaic heritages." In psychoanalytic metapsychology, the concept of ontogeny states that following birth organisms undergo a set of invariant stages or phases that are unique and occur in a given sequence. The concept also states that each member of the species recapitulates phylogenetically the major events of the history of the species. Freud states regarding the ego and the libido, "... both of them are at bottom heritages, abbreviated recapitulations of the development which all mankind has passed through from its primeval days over long periods of time" (Freud, 1917a, p. 354). Therefore, what biologists call a **phenotype**, a particular subject, ontogenetically incorporates aspects of his or her phylogeny. The *second assumption* is that regressive states in symptomatic adults were replicas of earlier childhood states (Freud, 1917b). The *third assumption* is that during psychoanalysis, it was possible to lift the **repression** around a forgotten memory and recover the actual events that occurred in childhood (Freud, 1895). Based on these assumptions, Freud felt that he could reconstruct the entire developmental sequence from the analyses of his adult patients. Thus, he established a direct relationship between his theory of psychopathology,

his clinical theory, and developmental events, maintaining the *tight linkage* between the three.

### **Ontogeny Recapitulates Phylogeny**

With respect to the first assumption, that is, ontogeny repeats phylogeny, Freud borrowed that principle from the biological theories current during his day. Freud used a mixture of Lamarckian and Darwinian principles to articulate his views of how we evolved in our social relationships (Freud, 1913). He believed that what occurs during development reflected the actual history through which our early ancestors lived. For example, the Oedipus complex reflected the internalization of what occurred when human beings still lived in small tribes and tribal chieftains were the object of their children's jealousy. The children would plot the overthrow of their fathers in order to ascend to power. Human beings incorporated these patterns into their sexual and aggressive instincts, which then find expression in the oedipal phase at around age 4. Present day biologists consider the principle that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny in Freud's sense of the use of the term to be false; however, they consider that, during fetal development, ontogeny does recapitulate the *embryonic stages* of our evolutionary ancestors. This latter interpretation has little applicability to psychological development.

### **Development Reconstructed**

For decades after Freud enunciated it, psychoanalysts accepted the second assumption that regressive states observed in symptomatic adults who were undergoing psychoanalysis were replicas of earlier childhood states. Freud had constructed his developmental theory from these data. Through circular reasoning and lacking any data from the direct observations of children, Freud maintained that it was possible to find confirmation for his developmental theory in the symptoms that his patients manifested in the clinical setting. As we will see, this assumption remained unchallenged until Stern's contribution appeared in 1985.

### **Repressed Memories of Sexual Abuse Led to Neurosis**

The basis for Freud's third assumption was his early conviction that a direct relationship existed between the sexual abuse that he believed his patients had suffered and their neurotic symptoms. For him, psychoanalysis provided a method through which to uncover the historical events that led to the patient's illness. Later on, when the data did not support this contention for all patients, he corrected his view that a causal relationship exists between what patients remembered and what had actually occurred. He concluded that in some cases, the recollections that occurred during psychoanalysis were *fantasies* that represented distortions of the

actual events that had occurred. The patient's instinctual drives and wishes were responsible for those distortions (Freud, 1905, pp. 190–191).

Controversy surrounds the issue of whether he rejected the notion that the abuse had actually occurred because he feared alienating his colleagues and the influential relatives of his patients or whether he did so out of pure theoretical necessity (Masson, 1985). However, he retained his conviction that a tight linkage existed between his developmental theory and his theory of psychopathology. The causal linkage was not between an actual event and a symptom, but rather between an unacceptable wish and the guilt that it produced that led to the symptoms. Internal conflict became the central organizing feature of the human condition. Each phase of development, the oral, the anal, and the phallic/oedipal, had its own set of conflicts. If unresolved these conflicts manifested themselves in patients' neurotic symptoms and it was possible, therefore, to reconstruct the patients' developmental histories from their recollections.

As we will see, in spite of its problematic nature, a fact that did not gain wide recognition until much later, these assumptions, which were embedded in Freud's methodology for the construction of a theory of development, were carried forward into the work of Abraham (1924/1927), Blos (1967), Erikson (1980), Anna Freud (1936/1966), Hartmann (1964), Kernberg (1975), Klein (1923), Mahler (1968), Mahler, Pine, & Bergman (1975), and Winnicott (1965). Each sought to find confirmation for their developmental theories in their patients' symptoms. Mahler in particular, in spite of her direct observation of young children, formulated some of her key concepts, such as the phases of primary autism and the symbiotic phase, not as a result of infant observation, but rather because the concepts had to be postulated as theoretically necessary in order to explain some childhood disorders. Mahler's theory not only maintained the tight linkage between clinical and developmental theories, but the theory also circularly confirmed itself. Stern (1985) challenged these assumptions by bringing to our attention the voluminous work on infant observations that had accumulated during the 1950s through the 1980s, but that psychoanalysts had virtually ignored with the notable exception of Spitz.

## *Freud's Legacy*

We can infer three principles from these assumptions that Freud bequeathed to us with respect to developmental theories that present us with further conceptual challenges. The *first principle* is that a developmental theory is a critical adjunct to understanding psychopathology because of the light that it sheds on the genesis of disorders. Few psychoanalysts question the proposition that such a tight linkage exists between childhood events and the psychopathology that ensues. The construct of **developmental psychopathology** remains one of the enduring contributions of psychoanalytic theory (Freud, 1918).

The *second principle* is that developmental theory provides the foundation for a clinical theory because it articulates the interventions that therapists use in

work with their patients. The patients' transferences that evolve during the therapeutic process reflect the events and attitudes that patients experienced in earlier years. Understanding the nature of those transferences makes possible an understanding of the origins of the problem and supplies a guide to the interventions to use to alleviate a patient's distress (Freud, 1912). Differing psychoanalytic or **psychodynamic** schools have arisen around different interpretations of this principle. Some schools view childhood conflicts as central to the human condition. The advocates of this position, such as those who subscribe to drive theory and ego psychology, agree with the concept of a tight linkage between development, psychopathology, and clinical interventions (Kernberg, 1976). Others consider psychological deficits or flaws in human character to be cardinal features of the human condition. The advocates of this position, such as the adherents to relational theory (Hoffman, 1992; Mitchell, 1988), reject the concept that a tight linkage exists between the past and the present difficulties of patients. Each school prescribes its own techniques for clinical interventions.

The *third principle* is that observations of patients' **regressed states** provide the data on which to construct a developmental theory; that is, the symptoms a patient currently manifests are replicas of an actual earlier developmental stage through which the person traveled (Freud, 1925). This means that some aspect of the person's personality failed to progress because the person faced issues that were too problematic to be resolved. The failure to resolve the conflicts of that stage laid down a vulnerability that became reactivated later in life. This principle endures to this day, although some theorists, such as Kohut, reformulate it by substituting the defense of disavowal for that of repression. Kohut maintained that it is not the repressed events that reemerge, but rather the developmental failure caused by those events that manifests as symptomatic behaviors.

The legacy left by these principles extends beyond the purely methodological issues of what constitutes valid data for the construction of a developmental theory. Embedded in the principles are fundamental philosophical assumptions as to whether we can access reality directly through observation or can only arrive at it through indirect means. Philosophers couch this issue in terms of whether positivism or social constructivism (Hoffman, 1992) and hermeneutics can lead to the truth about our universe. We return to this issue in the last section of this introduction.

## Models of Development

In contrast to the early decades of the history of psychoanalysis when successions of development theories reached their apex and were dominant, no such theory has achieved a similar hegemony nowadays. Libidinal drive theory came first. It was followed by ego psychology's and object relations' modifications to that theory. Erikson and his life cycle theory appeared next followed by Mahler's separation-individual theory. Sullivan's interpersonal theory represents an interlude between these historical developments. Stern's theory succeeded Mahler's theory and was the last to gain broad acceptance. Stern's theory has now receded into the

background and is being progressively replaced by efforts to formulate a theory based on neurodevelopmental principles (Fonagy & Target, 2003; Greenspan, 1989, 1997; Schore, 1994). These last efforts are controversial and their completion remains a work in progress.

Moving beyond individual theories, each developmental theory confronts a set of concerns that it must address. In what follows, we outline some of these concerns. We consider the *methodological issues*, some *questions* that developmental theories should answer, and the *narrative structure* of developmental theories. Each of these contributes to the ultimate structure of the model of development that ensues.

## ***Methodological Considerations***

Historically, from a methodological perspective, theorists have taken three different perspectives in their descriptions of development. They are the ***descriptive perspective***, the ***interpersonal perspective***, and the ***intrapersonal or intrapsychic perspective***. Each of these describes psychological phenomena by giving the observer a spatial location in relation to the subject that is the object of their observations (see Palombo, 2006, pp. 7–11).

*The descriptive perspective* involves taking an “objective” position in relation to the subject, much as scientists view physical phenomena. The location of the observer is a “cosmic” position. From this perspective, the observer conceives of psychological phenomena as emanating from structures that include a set of functions that have enduring existence and that can be described from a neutral position. These structures represent mechanisms that are subject to “laws of nature” that are universally applicable. This perspective is a positivist perspective, borrowed from the natural sciences, and is central to Freud’s metapsychology. Freud conceived of himself as a scientist whose insights came from such a perspective. In comparing himself to Copernicus, he felt he was able to view the human psyche from a transcendental position. Therefore, he could explain symptomatic behavior through the underlying, unseen, unconscious motivations that directed those behaviors while simultaneously describing psychological mechanisms in universal terms. This position is also evident when he discusses development. Here, he takes both an external perspective through which he can describe the interactions between parent and child, and simultaneously takes an internal perspective through which he can infer the unconscious psychological processes that he presumed to be taking place within the child, that is, the drives cathect an object. Most ego psychologists subscribe to this perspective, as do attachment theorists.

*The interpersonal perspective* always involves more than one person and locates the observer in the space between the interacting subjects. It retains aspects of the positivism of the descriptive perspective by simultaneously proposing conjectures as to people’s interactions with others and their internal psychological states. Some have called this perspective the view of a “two-person psychology.” The observer

is an invisible investigator, who has the ability to describe the processes in which the subjects engage. The phenomena occur in the intersection of the fields created by the interacting subjects. Whereas the invisible observer takes a position that is equidistant from the interacting subjects and can report on the processes that guide the relationships, at times, the observer jumps to a different view reporting on the intrapsychic processes that the subjects have internalized. At that point, the observer takes a descriptive perspective of the subjects' psychic processes, describing those as identifications, projections, and projective identifications. The observer feels privileged to give an account of those processes. In spite of that, theorists who take this perspective generally claim that people construct reality from their subjective experiences, making no claim of an independent external reality. Most object relations theorists and Sullivan's interpersonal theory falls squarely within this perspective. These theorists believe that no underlying general principle guides everyone's conduct, rather understanding a person involves uncovering the *patterns* that characterize that particular person's personality.

In the *intrapersonal or intrapsychic perspective*, the location of the observer is an imaginary point within the subject's mind. The observer is intent on understanding the subject's experiences, motives, and the meanings the subject ascribes to those experiences. Empathy permits the observer to understand and apprehend the contents of another person's mind, leading to an understanding of how a person feels, thinks, and perceives reality (Kohut, 1959). This perspective allows the observer to resonate affectively with the internal state of the subject. It assumes that because of the common human bond that exists between all human beings, the observer can decipher the psychic reality of others and the special meanings they attribute to their experiences. Self-psychology, which adheres to a hermeneutic point of view, in particular, Kohut's concept of empathy as vicarious introspection, is paradigmatic of this perspective.

In summary, each perspective has strengths and weaknesses when applied to the creation of developmental theories. The strength of the descriptive perspective is that it can provide generalizations about mental phenomena that act as guides to an understanding of all subjects; that is, they can provide universal rules for human thought and conduct. Their weakness is that they have difficulty in explaining subjectivity and the uniqueness of each person's experiences. The interpersonal perspective is subject to its own set of difficulties. On the one hand, it provides insights into the interactional aspects of human relations, in particular, the social and cultural dimensions, but on the other hand, it too must justify how it is possible for an external observer to enter into the mental lives of subjects to explain their internal dynamics. For the intrapersonal perspective, meanings are singular and often idiosyncratic to each person. People construe meanings from their experiences based on their particular cognitive maturity, exposure to the social context, and the psychodynamics operating at the time of their exposure to events. However, a major problem for this perspective, which we encounter with Freud's developmental theory, is that we cannot universalize the meanings that people ascribe to experiences. Freud wished to universalize the meanings that children construed from their encounters with their caregivers, efforts that led to the application

of the myth of Oedipus to a particular phase of development for all persons. Developmental theories that operate from this perspective are constrained in their ability to generalize on their descriptions of phases or stages.

We arrive at the unsettling conclusion that each of these methodologies presents an irresolvable dilemma. If we wish our theory to be applicable universally and capable of being obtained through objective observations, we either end up with a behaviorist theory or one that has difficulty accounting for how people ascribe meanings to their experience. On the other hand, if our theory focuses too narrowly on how people construe meanings from their experiences, we will have difficulties in generalizing as to how people arrive at those meanings and run the risk of being left without a theory of development.<sup>1</sup>

### *Questions for Developmental Theories*

Regardless of which of these three perspectives theorists take, they confront a series of questions that they should answer. Providing answers to each of these questions challenges the theorist to take positions on thorny issues. These among many others are some of the questions:

- What is the balance between the contributions of nature and nurture in influencing the direction that development takes?
- What role does the social context in which a child is raised play in development?
- Most theories emphasize the significance of the caregiver in children's development. Does the theory describe how the quality of the caregiving affects development?
- Does progression through the course of development occur in stages or phases that are normatively sequential or do the dominant themes extend through the person's lifespan, or, to put it differently, is the developmental progression continuous or discontinuous? (see Appendix A for a discussion of this issue.)
- What forces drive the developmental process? Are there ontogenetic, epigenetic, or evolutionary forces that determine the path through which development travels?
- What are the processes that lead to the formation of mental structures, such as mental representations or defenses?
- Does the theory take into consideration the integration of affects in moving forward or retarding the course of development?
- Are conflicts, deficits, or both central to the derailment of development?
- How much carryover is there of early influences into adult personality, whether positive or negative?

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<sup>1</sup> See Chap. 19, Conclusion for an elaboration of the issues associated with the philosophical underpinnings of these perspectives.

- Does the theory account for self-righting tendencies, that is, the capacity for resilience and for protective factors to undo the effects of adverse events?

Hardly any psychoanalytic developmental theory undertakes to provide answers to all these questions. Most theorists follow an agenda set by historical factors or predetermined theoretical preferences. Consequently, it is difficult to propose a set of criteria by which to evaluate a given theory. We are left with the criteria of *coherence* and *completeness*, that is, that a theory must be internally consistent and be sufficiently inclusive so as not neglect to address any major set of concerns or data. For an approximation of a criterion by which to judge the coherence and completeness of developmental theories, we turn to a discussion of their narrative structure.

## *Narrative Structure of Developmental Theories<sup>2</sup>*

There is general agreement that clinicians construct case histories, or **narratives**, out of patients' data. As narratives, these case histories have a protagonist, a plot, a beginning, middle, end, and a dramatic core that is critical to the psychodynamics that motivates the patient. We suggest that a useful heuristic device for comparing and contrasting different developmental theories is to view them as narratives with a structure, whose central metaphor provides the organizing theme that lends coherence to the narrative (Palombo, 1992).

Literary circles use the term narrative to characterize a form of written expression. They applied the term to such works as epics, sagas, romances, novels, and other genres (Polkinghorne, 1988; Scholes & Kellogg, 1966). Among the questions that philosophers and psychoanalysts ask is, what do historians and clinicians add to a simple chronicle of events that transforms the text into a narrative? (Mitchell, 1980). White (1980) noted that the difference between a chronicle and a historical account, that is, a narrative, is that the chronicle provides a simple list of events, whereas a historical account adds to that list of events *a theme that unifies and gives coherence* to the events in the list. The historian is the agent who interprets the chronicle and adds the theme that makes the story intelligible.

In a different context, Scholes and Kellogg, in their work *The Nature of Narrative* (1966), gave two distinguishing characteristics of a narrative: (a) the presence of a story and a storyteller (p. 4), and (b) its fictional rather than factual or historical character. Sarbin, a psychologist, extends the application of the concept of narrative beyond the fictional. He argues that the case histories that clinicians write are narrative in character. In contrast to the literary definition of the term, he gives the following definition:

... *Narrative* is coterminous with *story* as used by ordinary speakers of English. A story is a symbolized account of actions of human beings that has a temporal dimension. The story has a beginning, a middle, and an ending. The story is held together by recognizable

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<sup>2</sup>What follows in this chapter represents a modified version of Palombo (1996).

patterns of events called plots. Central to the plot structure are human predicaments and attempted resolutions.

Sarbin (1986, p. 3)

When we apply this definition to the structure of developmental theories, the position states that developmental theorists do not simply chronicle the events of childhood, but rather, as historians of childhood, the creators of the theories, add their own interpretations and thematic organization to those observations. The resulting theory resembles a narrative (Howard, 1991; Schafer, 1980, 1981, 1983; Spence, 1982, 1987; White, 1980).

## ***Root Metaphors***

We can enhance our understanding of the narrative structure of developmental theories by conceptualizing the central organizing feature of the theory as subscribing to a root metaphor. Pepper (1942) describes the concept of **root metaphor** as follows:

“A man desiring to understand the world looks about for a clue to its comprehension. He pitches upon some area of common sense fact and tries to understand other areas in terms of this one. This original idea becomes his basic analogy or root metaphor. He describes as best he can the characteristics of this area, or... discriminates its structure. He undertakes to interpret all fact in terms of these categories” (p. 91).

Theories attempt to redescribe parts of the universe through a metaphor (see Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This metaphor explains the phenomena more meaningfully because, at first, it translates them into a language that is more familiar and understandable. As the theory grows in complexity, the theorist introduces a technical language that makes the phenomena more experience distant, and more abstract. We may say that scientists retranslate their observations into a metaphorical language that permits the formulation of hypotheses that are verifiable or falsifiable. For example, for physics, mathematics is its preferred language; for chemistry, it is that of the elements that constitute all matter; for biology, it is that of the cellular structure of living organisms (Palombo, 1996).

Pepper suggests that an examination of intellectual history reveals that six root metaphors were used to model the universe (Pepper, 1942; Sarbin, 1986). They are (a) *animism*, the notion that all nature is imbued with life; (b) *formism*, the Aristotelian concept that each organism has within it the seed of its structure, which will guide its development; (c) *mysticism*, the belief that a person may merge with nature or the universe to attain a higher level of being; (d) *mechanism*, the concept that all processes including those of human development may be understood as analogous to a machine; (e) *organicism*, the theory that all living matter, as organisms, may grow through the ingestion of nutrients and follow a developmental sequence; and finally, (f) *contextualism*, which is the view that the best approach to understand all human phenomena is to view them in their

historical contextual environment and understanding their meaning. Of these six, the ones with which we are most familiar in the psychological domain, and which we address in this work, are the **mechanistic**, the **organismic**, and the **contextual metaphor**.

Most current psychoanalytic developmental theories rely on two particular types of root metaphors to organize their data, the *mechanistic* and the *organismic*. The mechanistic metaphor draws an analogy between minds and machines; that is, minds operate like mechanical devices that have component parts and that require energy to function, much as computers function. It uses a descriptive perspective in giving accounts of mental phenomena. The organismic metaphor draws an analogy between minds and living organisms, that is, minds operate like living organisms that require adequate nourishment to survive. It uses both descriptive and interpersonal perspectives in theory construction. Some theories adhere to the *contextual* metaphor that focuses on the meaning of experience rather than on mechanical or organismic analogues. These theories use an intrapersonal perspective in their explanations of psychological phenomena.

Root metaphors lead observers to frame the questions they pose of developmental theories within the language of the metaphor. Consequently, the answers to those questions follow from the analogies made to the metaphor. For example, if a theory uses the metaphor that the mind is like a computer, the answer to the question of what constitutes pathology is that a breakdown of some component of the computer has occurred. The conceptual categories applied to the phenomena come from the model the metaphor uses. Since phenomena do not fall into “natural categories,” that is, categories are creations of our minds rather than found naked in nature, the metaphor dictates the categories that divide the field of observation and hence shapes those observations. Adherence to a root metaphor compels the theorist to maintain the perspective of that metaphor or risk incoherence. If the theorist steps outside the metaphor to account for phenomena, the result is a mixed metaphor. As we know, mixing metaphors is a cardinal sin in literary expression. Similarly, in the construction of theories it ensures conceptual confusion.

We can compare and contrast the root metaphors that theories use. We can also direct criticisms at a theory for its use of a particular root metaphor. Alternatively, we can maintain that one root metaphor is superior to another if it presents fewer conceptual problems than do others. However, it is not possible to argue that one root metaphor gives a more accurate description of the universe than does another. Such a statement presumes that the metaphor is not a metaphor but a presentation of reality. In what follows, we discuss the uses made by some psychoanalytic developmental theories of these root metaphors. Each theory provides a model of what constitutes normative development. In what follows, we will refer to each theory as offering a model of development.

Because of the methodological problems this analysis presents, this section of our introduction may itself be regarded as a story, or a narrative, that deals playfully with the issues surrounding the formulation of psychoanalytic models of development. Our discussion of developmental theories may appear reductionistic, or may seem to caricature the positions we are describing. While this may in part

be true, we do not believe that we significantly distort the positions we present. The heuristic point we wish to make is that one means of comparing and contrasting developmental theories is by examining the root metaphors of those theories as central organizers of the narrative the theory presents.

## Root Metaphors in Developmental Theories

Oddly enough, psychoanalytic developmental theories rarely conform to a single root metaphor. Most violate the simple principle of not mixing metaphors, which our teacher of *English* drilled into us. We note the confusion that results when a developmental theory employs more than one root metaphor. On first appearance, the narratives these theories present seem to make sense and do not reveal the deeper incoherences and inconsistencies to which they succumb. Among those who violate this principle are all who adhere to a drive or energy model while simultaneously utilizing a different metaphor, such as an organismic or contextual metaphor. Freud is a prime example of someone who during his lifetime layered his metapsychology with metaphors that reflected the scientific interests of his times, utilizing first a mechanistic metaphor, then shifting to an organismic metaphor, all the while making use of a contextual metaphor in his clinical work and interpretation of dreams.

*Models Based on Mechanistic Metaphor.* The mechanistic metaphor is the dominant metaphor in the physical sciences. Phenomena are analogous to the components of a machine. The universe is like a perfect automaton whose laws scientists wish to discover. The modern variants of the mechanistic metaphor compare the mind to a computer that processes information (Holt, 1972).

Freud's **dynamic point of view** is perhaps the best example of a mechanistic/hydraulic model of the functioning of mind (Freud, 1894, pp. 60–61; 1917b, 1924). It is a point of view in which libidinal and aggressive energies drive all human feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Freud's model likens the mind to a steam engine that deals with the pressures produced by sexual or aggressive drives (Freud, 1923). The ego is an energy processing apparatus that transforms primitive, unneutralized, primary process energy into more refined, usable, and sublimated secondary process energy. The filtering system that effects this transformation is the ego that moves the energy from the id to the object that it cathects and back to the ego. With no channel through which the energy can flow outwardly, it becomes trapped within the system itself and interferes with its functioning. The result is psychopathology in the form of regressions or arrests that lead to neuroses or other disorders.

Ego psychological theories and object relationship theories [with the possible exception of Kernberg's (1975) object relations theory] utilize some variant of this metaphor in their dynamic metapsychological points of view. The dynamic point of view in ego psychology describes the interplay between the drives, the ego, the superego, and the reality that people confront. Imbalances between the drives and the ego lead to trauma due to the flooding of the ego by drive

energies. A punitive superego will respond to the unacceptable expression of drive energies with guilt as the hallmark of neurotic disorders. Finally, if the ego cannot mediate between the pressure of the drives that seek discharge and the constraints of the reality it confronts, it may collapse, leading to severe regressions or it may erect defensive barriers that severely constrain its ability to function and adapt.

*Models Based on Organismic Metaphor.* The organismic root metaphor is the most popular metaphor in psychoanalytic circles. Developmental theorists who favor this metaphor conceive of the human mind as an organism that becomes progressively differentiated from less developed (i.e., immature) to more developed (i.e., mature) states. Some of the theorists we consider, such as Spitz (1965) and Erikson (1964), espouse a related metaphor, the epigenetic model of development. **Epigenesis**, in contrast to ontogenesis, is a term derived from embryology that describes the process through which an organism develops through a set of hierarchical stages while preserving traits from prior stages. These traits have their origin in the heritable components that organisms carry within them genetically. The developmental model emphasizes the unfolding of preprogrammed stages or phases that emanate from within the organism over against the environmental forces that impinge on the organism.

Within the organismic metaphor, the mind requires nourishment to develop and grow. The nutriment comes in the form of an exchange between the partners in a relationship. The child forms a relationship to a caregiver and takes nourishment in the form of love, care, affection, devotion, or attunement. Children ingest the nutrients through such processes as imitation, and various forms of **internalization**, such as **incorporation** (drive theory), **introjection** (object relations theory), and **identification** (ego psychology) (see Schafer, 1968, for clarification of the confusion surrounding these terms). The nutritional value of the relationship becomes protein for growing children. They metabolize what they ingest which turns it into psychic structure. This metaphor emphasizes the adequacy, or inadequacy, of the child's relationship to the object. It places a value on the object's responsiveness to the needs of the child as determining whether the child will progress satisfactorily through subsequent phases. If the nourishment the object offers is toxic, that is, contaminated by anger or depression, then the child develops a case of psychic indigestion and cannot metabolize the incorporated object.

Other psychobiological processes include the principles of homeostasis, of flight/fight response to danger, or of adaptation. Typical development is measurable either by the extent to which the person approximates an ideal state of growth during each stage, or by the extent to which the person adapts to his or her environment. On the other hand, since the person's psychic unfolding is dependent on nutriment provided by caregivers, failure to receive appropriate nourishment or exposure to toxins, that is, to trauma, leads to psychopathology.

In the chapter sections that introduce each set of theories, we elaborate on the variant of the root metaphor each theory uses to illustrate this perspective. We will note that (a) Freud used an ingestion model (1912, 1917; Schafer, 1968), (b) Mahler

used an embryological model (1968, 1975), (c) Kohut used a translocation model (1971, 1977, 1984), (d) Stern referred to the Domains of the Self at the caregiver's attunement (1985), and (e) attachment theories used an evolutionary perspective (Bowlby, 1969). Other theories, included in this work, which are consistent with this model, are those of Abraham, Anna Freud, Hartmann, Spitz, Blos, Greenspan, Klein, Winnicott, and Kernberg.

*Models based on the contextual metaphor.* The contextual metaphor avoids some of the objectionable aspects of the mechanistic and ingestion models of growth. Pepper (1942) states:

When we come to contextualism, we pass from an analytical into a synthetic type of theory. It is characteristic of the synthetic theories that their root metaphors cannot satisfactorily be denoted even to first approximation by well-known common-sense concepts... The best term out of common sense to suggest the point of origin of contextualism is probably the historic event" (p. 232).

The contextual metaphor proposes that each system is composed of a set of interrelated elements whose sum is greater than the individual parts. Furthermore, any part is not understandable independently of other parts, though not every part is necessarily related to every other part. Such are theories whose central conceptual organization centers on understanding how individuals ascribe meanings to their experiences. Those meanings are woven together into a historical narrative that, like a tapestry, depicts the person's life.

Whereas it is possible to construct a developmental theory using this metaphor by focusing on the domain of meaning, such a theory would be very different from the traditional developmental theories discussed earlier. Its aim would be to give an account of the genesis and organization of the meanings of experience. Its task would be to examine human experience and its encoding into a set of signs. It would explain how a person construes meanings from self-experience, and would give an account of the elements that shape the meanings of those experiences. In addition, it would clarify the way in which each person develops a unique interpretation of the particular life episodes to which he or she is exposed, and would describe the progression through which each person moves to gather the components of self-experience into meaningful themes that integrate the parts into a whole. This whole will then constitute the person's self-narrative. It is not an accident that since most relational psychoanalytic theories subscribe to this metaphor they have had difficulty in articulating a developmental theory consistent with their view. The developmental model that Palombo provides of Kohut's self-psychology is an example of a developmental theory that conforms to the contextual metaphor. Its central organizing narrative theme is patients' search of self-cohesion.

In sum, the use of this analysis of each developmental theory provides a criterion by which to assess the coherence and completeness of the theory. By coherence, we refer to the consistency with which a theorist applies the metaphor and avoids the use of more than one metaphor, since mixed metaphors result in confusion rather than clarity. Completeness requires that the theory cover as many of the phenomena that infants and children manifest as possible.

## Paradigms and Developmental Theories

We now turn to the question of whether developmental theories are paradigms or culture-bound creations that reflect the child rearing mores of the social/cultural group of the author. That is, are developmental theories paradigms with a set of hypotheses that articulate universal propositions about the course of development, or do they constitute “ideal types” or prototypes, based on a social/cultural group’s view of a healthy individual? This controversy echoes the broader debate that is still taking place among philosophers and psychoanalysts.

Kuhn popularized the term *paradigm* in his classic work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970a). In that work, Kuhn sought to establish the thesis that in the history of the natural sciences a succession of different theories gained ascendancy. Each theory had a period of hegemony only to find itself overthrown and displaced by a different theory. These theories, which Kuhn called paradigms, consist of sets of propositions or hypotheses that order investigators’ observations. The hypotheses are law-like statements that presume to describe causal relationships between events. The laws embodied in these hypotheses are universally applicable irrespective of the context. When a paradigm is overthrown, a new one replaces it.

Some infer from Kuhn’s thesis that theories are no more than culture-bound editions of explanations scientists give of their surroundings at the time of their creation. Each edition reflects the bias of a particular period in history. Others, including some philosophers of science, disagree with this interpretation of Kuhn’s work and find the notion that knowledge is culture bound as unacceptable because it means that there are no ultimate truths, each culture’s set of truths are as valid as those of any other culture (Kuhn, 1970b). These differing interpretations of Kuhn reflect the tension between those who adhere to a **positivistic** perspective and those who subscribe to **hermeneutic** or **social constructivist** approaches. These philosophical debates have their reverberations in psychoanalytic circles (Stern, 2002).

Positivists contend that science is a systematic public enterprise controlled by logic and empirical fact, whose purpose it is to formulate the truth about the natural world (see Bernstein, 1983). Sensory observation is the source of external or experience distant data. Self-reports from patients of their introspections, which Freud believed to be obtained through evenly hovering attention and association, have their source in the internal near psychological events. Both of these sources yielded equally valid data. Natural laws emerge from these observations and reflect an order inherent in nature. These laws or general hypotheses may be ordered into a hierarchy of increasing generality and complexity. Testing these hypotheses involves an appeal to facts disclosed in common observation of data. Predictions are possible based on tested hypotheses. The vision is of a universe of objects with independent existence (see Scheffler, 1982).

Critics of positivism, broadly identified as the postmodern movement, such as the **intersubjectivists** and **relational theorists**, offer alternate views. They hold

that realities are multiple rather than singular and fixed. All data are theory bound and contextual rather than objective and decontextualized; the observer and the observed cannot be separated. Since it is not possible to establish causal relationships between events, only the recognition of patterns in sequences of events is possible, and finally, inquiry is never entirely value free (Guba, 1990). These principles lead to the conclusion that theories are ideographic, that is, they provide descriptive accounts of the patterns to which the phenomena they describe conform. Each discipline bases itself on different belief systems, different methodologies, and each aspires to different goals. Some radical critics of positivism go so far as to claim that even the natural sciences offer no more than sophisticated culture-bound theories of the segment of the universe they explain. Others insist that there are irreconcilable differences between the natural and the social sciences. They claim that while positivist approaches are successful for the natural sciences, constructivist or hermeneutic approaches are more appropriate to the social sciences (Saleebey, 1994).

Freud, trained as a neurologist, saw himself as a scientist who was simply describing the world, as it existed. This positivistic stance led psychoanalysts to insist for decades that psychoanalysis should take its place among the domain of sciences, such as the physical and biological sciences. During the first half of the twentieth century through the 1960s, psychoanalysts such as Hartmann (1958, 1964) and Rapaport (1951, 1960) hoped to emulate the model of the natural sciences and move psychoanalytic theory to the status of a scientific paradigm. They wished to discover the general laws that guided human development and the functioning of the mind. According to their view, a developmental theory formulated the universal phases or stages through which children mature. Theories of psychopathology similarly expressed the universality of neurotic conflict, or modeled themselves after the medical view that toxins, such as trauma, cause patients' illnesses. As positivists, these psychoanalysts insisted that psychoanalytic theories, as paradigms, utilized the scientific method to arrive at their metapsychological formulations. Their descriptions of the functioning of the human mind reflect the objective reality that exists independently of our explanations.

With the decline of the hegemony of positivism, these hopes faded for psychoanalysts. Hermeneutic and social constructivist approaches, with their relativistic biases, displaced the certainty that the positivists wished to attain (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen & Gergen, 1983, 1986; Hoffman, 1992; McGuire, 1990; Ricoeur, 1980). The hegemony of ego psychology was displaced by a proliferation of psychoanalytic theories such as object relations, attachment, self-psychology, intersubjectivity, interpersonal, relational, and other theories. Each of these attempted to respond to particular criticisms of Freud's classical model.

In response to these criticisms, the positivists, such as Basch (1976, 1988) and Lichtenberg (1983), attachment theorists (Schore, 1994, 2000), and others rejected the contention that those concepts derive from the social-cultural context within which they are created and that the social-cultural context imbues every member of its community with a worldview, which they cannot transcend. Often, these theorists do not always state explicitly the philosophical ground on which they

founded their theories, which leads to confusion about their position. More recently, with the effort to integrate the findings of the neurosciences with psychoanalytic metapsychology (Solms & Turnbull, 2002), some are proposing the use of complexity or chaos theory as a systems approach that resolves many of the problems these critics of the positivist positions raise (Miller, 2004).

So far, we have simplified the issues by presenting polarized positions. In reality, the controversy is much more complex with numerous participants presenting differing views in the debate. Some schools neglect to propose their own developmental theories, whereas others see no need for such a theory. Psychoanalysts continue to evolve in their position to respond to criticism leveled at them.

## Summary and Conclusion

Psychoanalytic practitioners generally agree with the principle established by Freud that developmental theories play a central role in understanding human conduct. These theories provide a conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between past occurrences, present personality structure, and psychopathology. In addition, they are integral to the conduct of clinical practice because psychoanalytic clinical theories subscribe to the principles of developmental psychopathology, that is, that all psychopathology can be understood either as reflective of what occurred during development or a return to an earlier developmental phase.

Historically, Freud adhered to three assumptions in the construction of his developmental theory. These assumptions were that ontogeny repeated phylogeny, that is, that each member of the species reenacted developmentally the major events of the history of the species; that regressive states were replicas of earlier childhood states; and that during psychoanalysis, lifting the repression around a forgotten memory helped recover the actual events that occurred in childhood. The basic principle that undergirds these assumptions is that a direct relationship exists between his theory of pathology, his clinical theory, and developmental events. We characterized this relationship as tightly linked. The differing schools of psychoanalysis that evolved subsequently retained some of these assumptions while rejecting one or more of the three principles.

To facilitate the task of comparing and contrasting different theories we discussed the different methodologies available for the formulation of developmental theories, methodologies that use a descriptive, interpersonal, or intrapersonal perspective. Each methodology has its strengths and limitations, but combining methodologies in the construction of a developmental theory may lead to contradictory perspectives from which data are collected. Furthermore, for a developmental theory to propose a comprehensive model it must provide answers to several questions, including questions such as how much nature and nurture contribute to the developmental progression; does development proceed in stages or phases, or are each set of issues that children encounter continuous during the life cycle; how are psychological structures formed; and other questions.

We suggested a possible criterion for the assessment of the coherence and completeness of these theories to be not only the inclusiveness of the answers given to these questions, but also in the type of narrative that organizes the data within a theory. Each narrative incorporates a root metaphor. This metaphor provides a central theme around which the content of the narrative is organized. By applying this criterion, it becomes possible to evaluate whether a developmental theory is coherent or incoherent, that is, whether the theory uses a mixed metaphor whether it organizes its data consistently within its metaphor, and whether it is complete in the explanations that it gives.

Finally, we addressed the issue of whether developmental theories are paradigms or culture-bound creations that reflect the child-rearing mores of the social/cultural group. We suggested that some theorists are committed to the position that psychoanalysis must take its place among the sciences, using its methodology to affirm or falsify hypotheses. Others take a *social-constructivist* or *hermeneutic* stance, believing that psychoanalysis as a human science cannot appropriately comply with the requirements of the physical sciences. Some contributors to psychoanalytic theory, who challenge the view that psychoanalysis is a science, interpret Freud's clinical work as resembling that of hermeneutic scholars who approached the study of texts. They cite his analysis of patients' dreams as an example of the use of such an interpretive methodology. However, hermeneutic and social-constructivist approaches face the problem that their methodologies do not lend themselves to the collection and organization of empirical data on which to construct a developmental theory.

**Keywords** Contextual metaphor • Developmental psychopathology • Descriptive perspective • Dynamic point of view • Epigenesis • Hermeneutic • Incorporation • Identification • Internalization • Interpersonal perspective • Intrapersonal perspective • Introjection • Narratives • Mechanistic metaphor • Ontogeny • Organismic metaphor • Paradigm • Phenotype • Phylogeny • Positivist • Psychodynamic • Regressed states • Repression • Root metaphor • Social constructivist

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