Ronnie Solan

THE ENIGMA OF CHILDHOOD

The Profound Impact of the First Years of Life on Adults as Couples and Parents

ROUTLEDGE

THE ENIGMA OF CHILDHOOD

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Ronnie Solan

Translated and edited by Ian Dreyer

Scientific editing by Ruth Shidlo

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

The Enigma of Childhood was originally published in Hebrew by Modan in 2007.

First published 2015 by Karnac Books Ltd.

Published 2018 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A C.I.P. for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN-13: 9781782202110 (pbk)

Typeset by V Publishing Solutions Pvt Ltd., Chennai, India

Dedicated to my beloved husband and life partner
Dr. Haim Solan who inspired my writing

Note regarding the use of gender-specific pronouns

Throughout the text, the use of gender-specific pronouns (e.g., him/her; his/hers) in situations where an infant, child, or adult is being referred to generally, rather than as a specific, named person, the pronouns used are universally male. This is to ensure consistency and prevent the reader wondering to whom the text is referring. Where a particular gender is being referred to (e.g., mother, father), or a clinical vignette is being related, the appropriate gender-specific pronoun is used.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Ronnie Solan trained as a clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst in Switzerland and in Israel, where she became a training and supervising analyst. She works in Tel Aviv, with children, adults, and couples. For many years, she taught at the Israel Psychoanalytic Society in Jerusalem and the Psychotherapy Program of the Sackler School of Medicine's Continuing Education Program, Tel Aviv University. *The Enigma of Childhood* is her first book in English. The original Hebrew version of the book was widely acclaimed.

The love which founded the family continues to operate in civilization … it continues to carry on its function of binding together considerable numbers of people … and create[s] new bonds with people who before were strangers.

Freud, Civilization and its Discontents

PREFACE

Moshe Halevi Spero

The interpretation of child development that clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst Ronnie Solan lays before us in the chapters to follow significantly enhances the vast literature with a fresh and intriguing perspective on the dynamics of the unfolding of the ego, and self, and its relationship to other selves. Bringing to the workbench the special sensitivities of a participant-observer trained in psychoanalysis and personally and professionally influenced by Jean Piaget, Solan's approach deepens and expands our understanding of the challenge of human relationship between parent and child, couples and the partners in a psychotherapeutic relationship (clinical or supervisory).

There have been a few efforts to enlarge and update the post-Freudian psychosexual model of the early stages of child development—Irene Josselyn's classic work, *The Psychosocial Development of Children* (1978) springs first to mind, followed in more recent times by the empirical turn represented by the work of Daniel N. Stern (1985) and the essays collected by Joseph Masling and Robert Bornstein (1996). Each of these has emphasised a crucially new piece of the pie, though none in recent times has attempted an organised redeployment of the original Freudian stage theory. Even Margaret S. Mahler's watershed outline of the phases of early separation-individuation (Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975) begs for realignment with the revised insights into the microcosms of psychosexual development that have emerged in recent years. I have in mind especially the unique influence of the work of the various French schools of psychoanalysis and the post-Kleinians. Indeed, in the decades that have passed since the publication of these earlier works, we have experienced a significant change in our comprehension of preverbal mental experience, the role of mirroring and the aesthetic domain, pre-object relatedness, the *anlage* of early sensory mapping and rudimentary psychic envelopes, the pathways of internalisation and symbolisation, and other subtle dimensions of budding mentalization and the representation of self-other experience. These areas of advance have broadened the "reach" or tensile strength of our clinical capacities; in turn, the clinical yield has sharpened our theories. And yet there has been lacking a scholarly and clinically-sensitive outline that would gather and align, and further refine, these developments, and present us with a suitably augmented model of the developing mind that might guide the psychoanalytically-informed student of childhood.

The *enigma* of childhood that Ronnie Solan wishes to illuminate in this important book is one that emerges essentially from a paradoxical dimension that is inherent to human development. This enigma is not always experienced as such (that is to say, we tend to experience an inchoate kind of anxiety regarding childhood without being able to localize or objectify the experience); the enigma cannot be always spoken of as such except when problematized and refracted through the eyes of philosophers, poets and psychotherapists. Yet whether or not we apprehend this enigma as such, it quite literally churns within us—motivating our development, rendering it complex or conflictual, or stymieing us completely—as children growing up, as speaking beings (who must internalise the preexisting linguistic patterns which drench us in otherness and yet through which we must articulate our selves), and as partners in relationships. The same applies to the work of psychoanalysts and psychotherapists who struggle to navigate and articulate the unique and often contradictory qualities of relationship that unfold during the therapeutic process, and for whom the enigmatic quality of intrapsychic and intersubjective dynamics is the hub of the work. Given our pragmatic goals, we as psychotherapists have considerably less leeway for allowing the enigma of childhood to remain unexplored or merely metaphoric.

I was fortunate to notice the stirrings of Ronnie Solan's thinking on this matter that were first published in the most suitable format for such observations, *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* (1991). It became immediately clear that she had grasped something fundamentally healthy in the role that narcissism can serve as a kind of necessary psychic buffer for the painful divide that exists within the constant movement of the self between its own separateness and joinedness (Solan refers to this as "jointness"). Despite Heinz Kohut's revolutionary writing on narcissism during the late 1970's, the prevailing view of narcissism was as an expression of pathology, and thus Solan's notions were still novel. It is ironic that the capacity for joining that Ronnie Solan herself expressed through her writing lingered in my mind and work, and magically encouraged me to invite her to explore her work further for a collection I was editing, resulting in the exposition of her concept of "befriending the unfamiliar" (Solan, 1998).

As stated, the *enigma* of childhood refers to a disturbing paradox that arguably characterises human nature and the experience of being human; hence, this sense of enigma dare not be ignored. The paradoxical dimension Solan focuses upon is, in fact, a double or bifurcated phenomenon. The first dimension—which we might conceive of as outer-oriented—is that our sense of self is predicated upon otherness, modeled upon the others or "not-ourselves" around us, and remains sensitive, throughout life and all relationship, to the amount of other-than-self that can be enjoyed. The second dimension—initially inner-oriented—derives from the fact that the self also emerges from a state of narcissism, total non-otherness, what we colloquially refer to as selfishness. To a large degree, we could not have a sense of self adequately distinguished from other without a complement of narcissistic investment.

These separate but interrelated tensions confront the soon-to-become-ego immediately, though they cannot yet be conceptualised. The ego must ask itself, we can imagine: how much narcissism is required to protect the self, and how much narcissism must be sacrificed or submitted to some other kind of mental operation so that we might welcome, acknowledge, befriend others, otherhood? Or, in the query of the ancient Jewish sage Hillel (*Pirkei Avot*, 1:14): "If I am not for myself, then who will be for me; and when I am only for myself, who am I?"

This paradox effloresces the moment the infant (if not the fetus) opens his or her mouth, experiences a gap and foreign entities that enter this gap, and becomes responsive to stimuli from the sensory surround, especially through the Janus-faced barrier known as our skin—primarily definatory of the oral stage. The paradox is experienced again, relentlessly as the child becomes more aware (as oral-stage achievements disposed the child to be) of the presence of food and stool within the alimentary canal and the meaning of even more portals of the body—definatory of the anal stage. And this double-valenced tension increases exponentially as the multifaceted signifiers of gender and competitive sexual aims and objects further complicate and sexualise the achievements of the earlier stages—definatory of the Oedipal stage and its precursors. Here I must point out that Solan emphasises primarily the oral and anal phases of separateness-jointness, and at times the reader sorely feels the underemphasis of the role of Oedipus; we must anticipate a further work from her which would complete her outline in light of the latter phases of development.

This perspective of double paradox is exceedingly important. For our contemporary theoretical formulations and clinical experiences have taught us that narcissism—that is, a kind of "sound" or normative, secondary narcissism in contrast to the more limited use of the term to refer to pathological (narcissistic) states of mind—does not stand *opposed* to healthy selfhood or relationships with others. Rather, and most significantly, narcissism serves to cloak, envelope (to envelope, metaphorically, and also serving as a kind of "envelop" within which the self is contained) and protect the self, regulating the wear-and-tear of intercourse with others.

The pleasure of self-experience is thus linked directly to our capacity to tolerate, seek out and enjoy, or embrace, enigma ("paradox" as such is not an affect state), *as well as to be able to accurately attend to signals that indicate that the intensity or quantity of enigma might soon exceed some baseline of safety*. In articulating her unique approach to how the ego contends with this dilemma, Solan speaks of the self "befriending" otherness, creating a sense of familiarity about otherness, about itself in its relations with others. Her use of the term is apt since the root of the term *friend* is powerfully linked to love and joy.[1] If I correctly appreciate her ideas here, it must be said that Solan is describing a protective apparatus that constantly *replenishes* the inner sanctity, subtlety and privacy of the self while restoring the capacity to engage others. In one of the many applications of her theory, Solan generously picks up one of my own areas of research and underscores how jokes and a sense of humor might be designed, at root, to maintain a protective envelope around our earliest perceptions of the enigma of otherness.

In Solan's view—and I consider this novel and crucial—narcissism is reconceived as a veritable immune system for the self, elaborating upon Freud's most fruitful notion of the stimulus barrier (or protective barrier). This enables her to further hypothesise a broader narcissistic autoimmune system that continues to operate throughout life, and she is able to distinguish eleven functions of this system. Health and pathology in the domain of comfortable and efficient self-other relationships—chiefly: the capacity to maintain a sense of *familiarity* in a world of non-self stimuli, entities, and processes—can now be more accurately conceptualised in terms of different levels and qualities of narcissistic immune functioning, that depends, among other things, upon the degree of internalisation that has been achieved by the subcomponents of this system.

As the book unfolds, Ronnie Solan details several of the most significant and until now only partially delineated components of this fascinating paradox in order to reduce the sense of puzzlement that the enigma of childhood/selfhood tends to evoke within us. I am not thinking here of a dry, intellectual riddle that we would prefer to see finally resolved. Rather, I am referring to a deep existential knot that straddles the core of the psychological experience—the experience of self and of other—over which we stumble, or learn to enjoy, at every moment.

Hell, then, is not *merely* "other people," the typical misinterpretation of Sartre's important phrase in his play *No Exit* (1944). Hell is not the other as such, it is not "out there"; hell is the otherness that is indelibly part of self. This principle psychic anxiety stems from the fact that *self* will always enigmatically signify *other*; that we inevitably come to see ourselves as an object in the world of other persons' consciousness and by virtue of enigmatic qualities within the language spoken to us that we cannot entirely identify or decipher (Laplanche, 1999).[2] This enigma is at once alien and familiar, and the task of the narcissistic processes as conceived by Solan is to help maintain a balance.

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[1] The Old English *frēond* connotes friend, lover, or relative, and is cognate with the Old Saxon *friund* and Old High German *friunt* (German *freund*), and the Gothic infinite *frēogan*, to love.

The enigma of childhood, of the self in relation to narcissism and otherhood, might rightly be compared to a similar range of experience that captured Freud's attention long ago, and has preoccupied us since. I am thinking of the experience of the uncanny, *Das Unheimlich*, un-hominess, the sense of *fremde*, strangeness, the antonym of *freund* … that odd, or enigmatic sense that someone or some experience is simultaneously known and unknown, familiar and unfamiliar. We are generally aware of the fact that we cannot conveniently dilute the peculiar discomfort and sense of apprehension and expectation that the uncanny evokes by insisting upon a decision: "Which is it?" It would distort the true value of the uncanny if one were to force the experience into an overly dichotomous frame, just as Donald Winnicott brilliantly admonished us to not compel the child to declare whether he or she *found* the transitional object or *created* it. To do so would destroy all that is special about transitional experience and to ultimately impede the development of symbolization. Moreover, any effort to prematurely or unnaturally modify the experience of uncanniness or enigma that comprises specific dimensions of psychic development would result in diminishment, numbness or schizoid compromise. The narcissistic immune system, as Solan defines it, safeguards the lambent quality of enigma.

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[2] Similar to Solan's approach to the enigmatic quality of self, and of the role of narcissism, Jean Laplanche proposed the elevation of *seduction* from the purely pathological sphere so that we might better appreciate its fundamental role in the early architecture of essential psychic development. While a detailed discussion of this matter cannot be taken up here, suffice it to say that, differently than Freud's original or classic "general theory of seduction," Laplanche emphasised the crucial role of the adult other, and the other's unconscious, in the very formation of the child's (*qua* subject) psychical apparatus. In Laplanche's view, powerfully redolent of Lacan, the basic intrapsychic agencies—ego, unconscious and superego—can to some degree be viewed as secondary to the primal, enigmatic inscriptions of the other (conveyed by language and ploysemy), and as deriving their specificity from the partial successes and necessary failures of the infant's attempts to master, symbolise and "translate" those inscriptions. The overlap of Laplanche's ideas and Solan's concept of befriending the enigma of self-other/separation-jointness merits further exploration.

I will end my words with the following thought. It is refreshing to note, with indirect but inescapable relevance to the enigma of self, narcissism and the other, the following delightfully acidic personal episode offered by Freud, a gem that has been inexplicably (uncannily!) ignored in the vast psychoanalytic literature (1919, p. 248n):

> Since the uncanny effect of a 'double' also belongs to [the study of the uncanny], it is interesting to observe what the effect is of meeting one's own image unbidden and unexpected … I was sitting alone in my *wagon-lit* compartment when a more than usually violent jolt of the train swung back the door of the adjoining washing-cabinet, and an elderly gentleman in a dressing-gown and a traveling cap came in. I assumed that in leaving the washing-cabinet, which lay between the two compartments, he had taken the wrong direction and come into my compartment by mistake. Jumping up with the intention of putting him right, I at once realized to my dismay that the intruder was nothing but my own reflection in the looking-glass on the open door. I can still recollect that I thoroughly disliked his appearance. Instead, therefore, of being frightened by our 'double,' … I simply failed to recognize [it] as such. Is it not possible, though, that [my] dislike of the double was a vestigial trace of the archaic reaction which feels the 'double' to be something uncanny?

I believe that Freud offers us a compelling portrait of an enigma of childhood—if not *the* enigma of childhood!—that has lingered into adulthood. A deeply archaic, incompletely resolved sense of unfamiliarity or dislikeability that had managed to lie dormant (perhaps it is an anal one), hidden within a sense of self generally viewed as cohesive, known, predictable, and familiar, suddenly emerges—jolted, violently—(*einen heftingeren Ruck*)—as if dislodged by accident, temporarily distorting the sense of reality. That there is a "higher" oedipal connotation to the painfulness of the pseudo-encounter (the paternal "elderly gentleman") does not fully mask the deeper reverberations of *sheer otherhood*.

As I ponder Freud's intricate example it seems that he has also offered us a condensed isomorphism for the workings of the mind in analysis! That is, we can perhaps reconceptualize the private compartment—this suspended non-space shuttling along in a dreamlike mode between mental states and across borders—the looking-glass on the open door of the train *within* compartment, and the remarkably delineated *threshold* between mental spaces, as a simulacrum of the concept of the analytic frame. Momentarily distracted from convention and the etiquette of polite looking, the distracted mind, the mind in reverie, becomes more capable of gazing, or apprehending. The frame, through its magical involution of the dynamics of normative development, is designed to allow for the repetition of the 'vestiges' of an 'archaic' un-friendliness of the self toward some other, toward some sense of otherness. In the case of Freud, the other is temporarily experienced as an uncanny double; at other times in the form of mildly dissociative experiences of *jamais vu* and *déjà vu*, and at still other times in the sharply psychotic experience of an imaginary twin (Bion, 1950). Our customary 'night clothing' or envelopes cannot always conceal this enigma, or they congeal it to the point where all we can handle emotionally are dichotomies, splitting, black and white values and formalities. Whatever inner conflicts caused Freud to suffer a derealised (*Entfremdungsgefühl*) and intrusive self-other experience, Ronnie Solan would hope we could *befriend*. The challenge for the analyst and patient is to gradually learn anew how to contain and befriend these experiences and restore a more hospitable attitude toward enigma.

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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My aim in writing this book is to familiarise the reader with the child concealed in every adult, believed to represent the sum of memory traces of early life experiences. Each of us contains within him or herself layers of memory traces of various object-relation narratives from different stages of development. The concealed child reverberates within us in present situations, and affects our physical sensations and emotional reactions to them. This has an impact on the new relationships we create, on the way we relate as parents to our own children, and as partners in couplehood in its various forms.

The idea of writing a book arose from my wish to share with others the child's emotional development processes from birth; a stimulating subject that I was involved with over many years in seminars that I conducted. The seminars were part of a continuing education psychotherapy program at Tel Aviv University for psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers. For me, this is a fitting opportunity to thank the hundreds of participants in the seminars for their personal contribution to shaping my new theoretical approach to the child's dynamic development—an approach I will elucidate in this book. Some of my ideas have been previously elaborated and presented in various professional articles and in the Hebrew precursor to this book.

My basic view, using Winnicott's terminology, is that most parents are "good enough" and do the best they can for their child, depending on their personality, their understanding, and the kind of love they feel for their offspring.

> … in any case you will make mistakes and these mistakes will be seen and felt to be disastrous, and your children will try to make you feel responsible for setbacks even when you are not in fact responsible …. You will feel rewarded if one day your daughter asks you to do some baby-sitting for her, indicating thereby that she thinks you may be able to do this satisfactorily; or if your son wants to be like you in some way …. (Winnicott, 1971, p. 143)

The Enigma of Childhood sheds light on early psychic development in the oral and anal stages, its impact on the baby's evolution along a normal or pathological developmental course and the parents' influence on their baby's emotional development. The ages referred to in the context of the stages of emotional development are the average accepted age, deviations from which may be considered normative. The separation among different aspects of development is to some extent arbitrary and is done with the didactic intention of clarifying the processes described. It is done for the book to be accessible also to a readership that is not proficient in the analysis of emotional processes or familiar with clinical work. It is important to note that in daily life these aspects are intertwined and difficult to separate objectively.

Examples taken from clinical observations and treatments are presented to enable readers to improve their understanding of early developmental processes, and to familiarise them with the child hidden within themselves.

The Enigma of Childhood focuses on four major themes: narcissism, the ego, object-relations, and separation-individuation. These familiar basic concepts in emotional development are integrated and conceptualised in new theoretical and clinical terms.

My main contribution relates to the conceptualisation of the functioning of *healthy narcissism* as an emotional immune system for safeguarding the familiar sense of the self and for resisting any strangeness or otherness challenging this familiar sense. This conceptualisation will be examined in the context of the biological immune system. Moreover, I propose taking a fresh look at the functioning of the ego, including the distinction between the regulatory characteristics of adaptation mechanisms and defence mechanisms, and their operational modes at the oral and anal stages. This distinction will clarify how, through the functioning of the ego's adaptation, we improve and actualise our intelligence potential (psychomotor, cognitive and emotional) and cope with reality, as well as how we defend our self against strangeness, and the attendant fears and anxieties that may undermine our stability.

I suggest a new elaboration of normative object relations, defined as "jointness-separateness," which progress from birth along the lifespan, and are characterised during the oral stage by intimacy and in the anal stage by negotiation. This elaboration will clarify why I consider symbiosis in the context of the primary infant–mother relationship as an impairment in object relations.

Taken together, these concepts facilitate a better understanding of the foundations of normative emotional development. They also provide possible insights into impairments in narcissistic functioning and object relations that may lead to fragility and vulnerability of the self, immature individuation, narcissistic disorders, and pathological phenomena.

The innovative theoretical definitions that I propose are a continuation of the conceptualisation of development processes that first germinated in the greenhouse of my psychoanalytic forefathers and were nurtured by my mentors. I am aware that any theoretical innovation initially arouses a sense of strangeness and resistance; this, after all, is the subject of my book. At the same time, I hope that the way I will present my theoretical approach is sufficiently accessible and that it will facilitate the opening of emotional channels for absorbing the familiar and befriending the novel, without my having to resort to a review of well-known theoretical positions.

Many babies, children, and adults will populate the pages of my book. Some of them demonstrate normative developmental processes, others, emotional disabilities. The descriptions and the quotes from the therapies presented throughout this book are based on observations that I conducted of infants and children, as well as on my clinical and diagnostic work with children, adolescents, adults, and couples. I have selected the more salient examples (admittedly a small sample), in order to demonstrate my approach, based on many years of experience, against the backdrop of psychoanalytic and psychodynamic theory.

Identifying patient details have been deliberately obscured in order to maintain confidentiality. Nevertheless, the description of the emotional processes and the sequences of the personal narrative and of the events are authentic, so that the essence and the relevance of the processes are maintained. I wish to take this opportunity to thank my patients, from whom I have learned so much.

It has been my privilege to have studied under some of the foremost psychologists and psychoanalysts of our generation, including Jean Piaget at Geneva University, René Spitz at the Swiss Psychoanalytic Institute, René Henny at the Mental Health Center in Lausanne, and Erich Gumbel at the Israeli Psychoanalytic Institute in Jerusalem, all of whom opened the gates to reveal the wonderful world of the mind. I am deeply grateful to Marcel Roch from Lausanne, my personal mentor, under whose guidance, which I cherish, I chose psychoanalysis as my life's work. I am deeply moved that I am able to present in this book my own theoretical contribution to the understanding of the emotional development of the child that draws on the heritage of my teachers. This is my way of thanking all my teachers, including those whose names I have not mentioned, for their considerable investment in imparting to me their treasures of knowledge.

Many thanks to my dear ones: My husband, Haim Solan, for his considerable and challenging contribution to the linguistic processing, conceptualisation and transformation of my handwriting into an accessible book, a contribution that enabled us to reach new heights of creative partnership in our relationship. To my daughter, Anat Ben-Artsy Solan, whose critical, dynamic-developmental and integrative psychological thinking contributed so much to the professional editing of this book; to my other children, Zach Solan and Shira Solan-Shoham—as well as to their spouses, Shay, Maly, and Avishai—for their warm and loving encouragement and constant support. My love and thanks to all my grandchildren for the privilege of being a close participant in their experiences and for allowing me a fascinating look into the wonders of their development. I am deeply thankful to Dr. Ruth Shidlo for helping to conceptualise the book and for her scientific editing assistance. Finally, my grateful thanks to Ian Dreyer, my translator and editor, for his ability to effortlessly handle the Hebrew text.

In addition, I would like to thank Oliver Rathbone and the staff at Karnac, including Constance Govindin, Rod Tweedy, Tom Hawking, and especially, Cecily Blench, for their unwavering and most professional assistance throughout the publishing process. It has been a pleasure to work with them.

PERMISSIONS

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PART I

THE ORAL STAGE—THE STAGE OF INTIMACY

FROM BIRTH TO EIGHTEEN MONTHS

Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto
I am a man: nothing human is alien to me (Terence)

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CHAPTER ONE

Beginnings

In the early morning hours, Sean makes his way from his mother's familiar womb into a new world: an unfamiliar space filled with light, in which all the living conditions are different from those he was used to. The sensory stimuli from his mother's womb and from the moments of his birth are engraved in him forever as memory traces of initial life experiences, providing him with a basis for differentiating the familiar from that which is strange and novel in his new world.

The beginning of emotional life

We are amazed by the development of the foetus in its mother's womb, created by the merging of two separate and different cells, a creation that has similar characteristics to its two progenitors but also differs from them. The mother and the foetus, two separate entities sharing a common space, the womb, are connected to each other by the umbilical cord and the placenta. At times, the foetus is asleep and the mother is awake, anxious as to why it does not move; at other times, she sleeps and the foetus, now awake, disturbs her sleep. Sometimes, however, she tends to deny the foetus's separateness and tries to experience its existence within her as if they were unique entities. This flowing between people, from being separated to joining together, continues throughout life.

A mother is attentive to the tempo of her foetus's movements and reactions, and tries to interpret them and to make contact with the foetus by touching her belly or singing to it. She observes the foetus's movements on the walls of her abdomen as its form changes, and can view the movement on an ultrasound. She gets to know the foetus and tries to imagine how it will look when it emerges. In this way, as she "imagines the real", to borrow Buber's (1947) phrase, she transforms her unfamiliar foetus into a more familiar object, and longs for the moment she can hold her baby to her bosom. Feelings of love for it begin to surge in her.

The foetus in the womb is affected by its physiological conditions in the uterus and by the mother's emotional states, but it has no way of understanding them. Nevertheless, the womb is its familiar place, and by surviving while moving in this enclosed space, a sense of familiarity and well-being is aroused in the foetus, until the moment arrives when it is sufficiently equipped to emerge into the world.

Now, the newborn enters a totally different and strange world, one in which he is forced to breathe by himself. Crying is released from his throat. Possibly, he experiences himself as unfamiliar and encounters his mother from a new and unfamiliar perspective. Without doubt, this is a dramatic and traumatic moment for the newborn baby, and he needs all the help his parents can give him in order to survive and to maintain his sense of self-familiarity in confronting the new, strange world.

In the mother's eyes, the severe labour pains and progressive contractions represent a process of separation: the emergence of her foetus from within her, the separation from her foetus, and finally, an encounter with her newborn. His new presence is different from anything she has previously imagined. She can no longer rely on sensing his movements within her, which, by their vitality, provided security. Now she has to be attentive to him and to how he conducts himself when outside her womb. She sees her offspring from a new perspective, no longer as a foetus "inside", but rather as a baby "outside". This is an encounter filled with uncertainty, apprehension and happiness as well as physical aches and pains, emotional, and hormonal outbursts.

The mother and the father, with all their life experience, vigilantly keep watch over their newborn, who requires constant surveillance. Despite preparations for the baby's arrival, the encounter with the unfamiliar is complex. In order to experience greater familiarity, confidence, and control in the new emotional situation, the parents seek guiding figures, and also recall similar past experiences. The connection with their personal emotional history and their roots give each of the parents a feeling of direct continuity with their unique past, of partnership with their spouse and with their baby, and of a shared future. In this way, the baby continues the intergenerational historical legacy, in addition to the genetic heritage he has inherited from his parents.

Natalie's birth is the first delivery her parents experience, and she confers a new title upon them—Mummy and Daddy. They feel the weight of responsibility imposed on them in light of the dramatic changes in their lives. Together with their great happiness, they are sensitive and vulnerable, and sometimes overwhelmed by feelings of fatigue and anxiety. Will they manage to cope with the task at hand, identify their baby's needs, respond to them, and protect her from all harm?

At three days old, Natalie leaves the maternity ward for home, which is familiar to her parents but strange for her. During the first days of her life Natalie had come to know the taste of the colostrum that she imbibed, but since then the milk flows abundantly from her mother's breasts, and its taste and consistency have changed. Natalie refuses to suckle and "escapes" into protracted sleep. Meanwhile, congestion is created in the breast, and Natalie, who wakes up as her hunger intensifies, finds it difficult to attach herself to the nipple in order to suck. As an act of survival, Natalie bursts into heart-breaking crying. The parents try to calm her, but are unsuccessful and may come to feel helpless. They find it difficult to grasp that the minor differences in the consistency of the milk and its taste can arouse in Natalie a feeling of strangeness.

From the moment of birth onwards, the baby is very vulnerable and sensitive to any change from the familiar that she may experience, both around and within herself. We now know that physical contact—such as hugging and kissing, the rhythmic rocking of the cradle, speaking and singing, smelling and seeing, as well as regular massages[1]—all contribute to improving the baby's immune functioning and creating an emotional bond between baby and parent. Gradually, the baby's sense of his familiar self begins to crystallise, accompanied by a sense of sensory self-identity, self-continuity, self-constancy, and object constancy—all of which culminate in self-security. The baby therefore identifies himself as familiar within his changing environment, and differentiates himself from anything that feels strange to him ("non-self").

Fortunately, we are born with an emotional "survival kit" (part of our biological survival system) that consists of innate sensory-emotional potential for development as well as mechanisms for control and regulation. This kit, which accompanies us throughout life, becomes increasingly more sophisticated under the influence of the relationship with our parents and our environment. The emotional survival kit is supported by three emotional systems:

a. The *emotional immune system*—representing the functioning of healthy narcissism—whose function is to safeguard the familiarity and the well-being of the self against invasion by foreign sensations. The immunisation vacillates between attraction to the familiar and rejection of that which is strange or novel, in other words, between well-being in the presence of the familiar and alertness upon facing strangeness.
b. The *emotional self-regulation system*—representing the functioning of the ego—whose function is to regulate drives and emotions by exploiting the potential of intelligence (with its psychomotor, affective, and cognitive components) for the management of adaptation or defence mechanisms. The regulatory process vacillates between two opposite poles: emotional turmoil and emotional restraint.
c. The *emotional attachment system*—representing the progression of object relations—whose function is to create an attachment characterised by emotional contact and interpersonal communication, and to maintain relationships with others despite their otherness and inevitable conflicts of interest with them. The attachment process vacillates between two opposing states: individuation and attachment.

These three systems operate harmoniously and interdependently, so that it is sometimes difficult to trace or distinguish each one's unique influence. The distinction, although somewhat arbitrary, is for didactic purposes. In the two parts of this book I will survey the functioning of the three emotional systems in each of the two pre-genital stages of development: the oral and the anal.

A review of several psychoanalytic conceptualisations concerning narcissism and object relations

The innovative theoretical conceptualisations that I propose are a continuation and extension of existing psychoanalytic developmental concepts. I would like to emphasise at the outset that while the narcissism I refer to is essentially no different from the concept we are familiar with, it does highlight new aspects that I propose we distinguish as healthy narcissism. Drawing from earlier works, I will illuminate the main aspects of these fascinating subjects, that is to say, the expressions of narcissism and object relations that have emerged in my clinical work and provided the links and continuity between previous conceptualisations and the theory I propose.

Four aspects of narcissism and object relations seem to me significant in the theoretical development of my psychoanalytic thinking:

a. the concept of narcissism
b. the need to defend the self against alien stimulation
c. narcissism, the self, and object relations
d. healthy versus pathological narcissism.

Following a discussion of some significant works pertaining to these four topics, I will present a summary of how this theoretical background contributes to my conceptualisations. I have chosen some of the works that most influenced my psychoanalytic thinking.

The concept of narcissism

The concept of narcissism is borrowed from Greek mythology, in which the young Narcissus falls in love with his image as reflected in a pool. Ever since Freud stressed the importance of narcissism in his theory (1950 [1887–1902], 1905d, 1914c), the concept of narcissism has become linked to self-love. Havelock Ellis (1898) was the first to connect mythological narcissism to psychological narcissism and used the term "narcissus-like". Nacke (1899) coined the phrase "love of the self" and used the term narcissism in a study of sexual perversions. In 1910, Freud discussed narcissism in the context of his clinical experience of sexual perversion and homosexuality. Rank (1911) viewed narcissism as the normal development of love toward one's body and as vanity and self-admiration. Freud (1914c) added a genetic (developmental) aspect to narcissism, proposing it as a stage of libidinal development (a stage in which the boundaries between self and object are not yet clear), as well as a dynamic aspect (in which the ego is experienced as a libidinal object and the individual might thus be proud of, and even love himself).

From 1899 to 1914 the central thesis regarding narcissism revolved around *primary narcissism*, the libidinal investment in the ego and in the ideal ego (the ego had not yet been differentiated from the self). "Narcissism in this sense", said Freud, "would not be a perversion, but the libidinal complement to the egoism of the instinct of self-preservation, a measure of which may justifiably be attributed to every living creature" (1914c, pp. 73–74). In the course of emotional development the libido is also directed toward the object (*secondary narcissism*), and Freud suggested that the libidinal withdrawal from the investment in the object to the ego/self constitutes the basis for pathology. The common denominator for all forms of narcissism (normal and pathological) is the love of oneself and the reference to one's own body or to oneself as a sexual object.

Freud's concepts of primary and secondary narcissism (1914c) are related to three phenomena: choice of an object, relationship pattern, and ego ideal (from which the concept of self-esteem has evolved as being virtually synonymous with narcissism). Libidinal investment directed solely to the ego/self or to the object might, in this sense, evoke a supreme experience of elation in the realm between idealisation, omnipotence, and infatuation. It might also arouse the blissful state defined as happiness when there is ostensibly no longer a need for external objects.

As early as 1908b, Freud claimed that nobody gives up anything, but rather, only replaces it with something else. Later he even added that man "is not willing to forgo the narcissistic perfection of his childhood" (1914c, p. 94).

Duruz (1981) suggests that "there is no psychic life without the formation of narcissistic ideals" (p. 35) and that "the goal of ideals is the restoration of an alleged stage of primary blissful narcissism" (p. 37). The source of narcissism, this absolute blissful state, the "oceanic feelings" and feelings of elation, Freud (1930a) located in the uterine phase ("monad"), which he sees as continuing in normal development.

The need to defend the self against alien stimulation

In 1950 [1887–1902], Freud was preoccupied with questions of the permeability and impermeability of stimuli in the nervous system and their relation to perception and memory. He coined the concept of a "protective shield against stimuli" (1920g, 1926d [1925]) and recognised its objective of filtering stimuli as an instinct of self-preservation (1914c).

After Freud, many psychoanalysts proposed various terms to express this need for self-protection, such as the "container object" (Bion, 1962), the "mother as a protective shield" (Khan, 1963), the "holding mother" (Winnicott, 1962), "psychic skin and second skin" (Bick, 1968), the "screening mechanism" (Esman, 1983), "ego-skin" and "psychic envelopes" (Anzieu, 1985, 1987), the "protective shell" (Tustin, 1990), and the "membrane, the family envelope, and structural stability" (Houzel, 1990, 1996). Symington (1993) assumes that narcissism embodies the characteristics of a protection against acute mental pain.

In *On Narcissism,* one of his most insightful essays, Freud discloses: "It is universally known … that a person who is tormented by organic pain and discomfort gives up his interest in the things of the external world … and sends them out again when he recovers …" (1914c, p. 82). Similar observations are described by Mahler when the baby's mother leaves the room: "the child withdraws into himself, apparently concentrating on the memory of the previous state of oneness or closeness with his mother, exhibits diminishing interest in his surroundings, and tries to maintain his emotional balance" (1968, p. 9).

Anzieu (1985, 1987) conceptualises the psychic protective envelopes and ego-skin on which external and internal stimuli leave memory traces, producing via their interconnections a kind of sensory map of proprioception[2] and of sensations. This sensory map serves as a frame of reference for differentiating the outside from the inside, and the familiar from the alien. The ego-skin thus contributes to the secure boundaries of the self. Moreover, Anzieu claims that within the ego-skin, that is aimed to protect the self, there is also a destructive component impacted by the child's death instinct, and often influenced by the mother's defects, which are seen as pathogenic in relation to the child's narcissistic integrity.

In this respect, Klein (1957) considers narcissistic situations as resulting from aggressive and destructive impulses linked to the death instinct. This destructive activity leads the baby (and any narcissistic personality) to project his or her hatred. When this occurs, the other is experienced as a threat, and the baby internalises threatening object representations. Developing Klein's ideas, Hanna Segal (1983) specifies that "narcissistic structure is an expression of, and a defence against, the death instinct and envy" (p. 275).

Freud (1950 [1887–1902]) attempted to find a common denominator between biological (neurological) and mental processes. Pally (1997a) relates to the reigning doctrine of neuroscience and emphasises that "mental phenomena are derived from biological … events in neuronal circuits" (p. 587). Neural circuits in a constant state of high arousal create constant network schemata that represent the memory of sensory stimuli, external or internal (Kandel, Siegelbaum & Schwartz, 1991). Associative links between neural circuits and the different brain centres together arouse a "sense of familiarity" (Tulving & Thomson, 1973) and of a familiar historical continuity (Pally, 1997a, 1997b).

These researchers claim that memories are encoded and stored in the neuronal network and are shaped into an index of imprints that provides a comparable basis for the recognition of a new stimulus as familiar. Martin (1991) indicates a special neuron receptor that converts the energy of the constant stimulation into neural codes that represent a "common language" for all the sensory systems. Familiar meaning is thus attributed to self-experiencing (Bollas, 1992; Modell, 1993; Ogden, 1989). The organising activity of sensory integration represents "an attempt to add meaning to incoming excitation … in terms of past experience and future activity … [that] constitutes an internal frame of reference by which the outside world is assessed" (Sandler, 1987, p. 3). Additionally, "the brain automatically and continually processes sensory stimuli, matches patterns and generates perceptions" (Pally, 1997b, p. 1025). Thus, pattern matching has special relevance for psychoanalysis, particularly transference. If a current situation activates a pattern that is similar to one stored in memory, because the brain only looks for a good-enough match, the brain may conclude that two different situations are the same. For this reason, we tend to 'see' what we have seen before" (ibid., p. 1026).

Tomkins (1962, 1963) and his student and colleague, Nathanson (1992), draw our attention to the importance of affect, a crucial ingredient in the mental representation of attachment and object relations, characterised by the kind of condensed/abstracted encoding to which the above authors refer. Thus, for example, in a discussion of the affect family of shame, Nathanson states: " … each time shame affect is triggered, we are drawn backwards in time to experience some representation of our lifetime of similar or related shames, whether or not we recognize the incident as typical of shame" (Nathanson, 1992, p. 307). Affect theory touches upon something else: " … the phenomenology of recall does far more than this … Stored along with our reminiscences of shames past are our recollections of all the ways we have made ourselves feel better when hurt … Intimately associated with the affect is our history of reaction to it" (ibid.).

As already recognised by Freud in the late nineteenth century, biological and emotional systems share many similar characteristics. I would like to draw attention to the similarity of function between biological immune processes and the emotional immune system.

Immunologists describe the biological immune system as a network of cells and tissues throughout the body that function together to defend the body from invasion and infection. Similarly, I conceptualise narcissism processing as the attraction to the familiar and a resisting of strangeness, and healthy narcissism as providing an emotional immune system (Solan, 1998a) that protects the self. Among other things, both rely on intact neural circuits and brain processing to function optimally. We can also recognise a common denominator between biological autoimmune disease and the pathological characteristics of the narcissistic immune system (see Chapter Six on defence mechanisms).

I assume that narcissism immunises the self against alien invasion into the familiar sense of the self by initially resisting unfamiliar stimuli (including the otherness of individuals), and by subsequently recognising the familiar embedded in the strangeness and restoring it after it has been challenged or hurt by the unfamiliar (Solan, 1998a). A few years later Britton (2004) also put forward the hypothesis of a similarity between the mental system and the immunological system. He did not, however, specifically consider the similarity with regard to narcissistic features. I obtain support for my assumption in view of Britton's remarks:

> I suggest that there may be an allergy to the products of other *minds*, analogous to the body's immune system—a kind of psychic atopia

> … The not-me or not-like-me recognition and response might fulfil a psychic function similar to that in the somatic … We are fearful about our ability to maintain the integrity of our existing belief systems, and whenever we encounter foreign psychic material, a xenocidal impulse is stimulated. (ibid., p. 60)

Freud (1918a, 1921c) postulated two other important phenomena, namely "self-love" and "narcissism of minor differences": "It is precisely the minor differences in people who are otherwise alike that form the basis of feelings of strangeness and hostility between them" (1918a, p. 199). Three years later, he wrote:

> In the undisguised antipathies and aversions which people feel towards strangers with whom they have to do we may recognise the expression of self-love—of narcissism. This self-love works for the preservation of the individual, and behaves as though the occurrence of any divergence from his particular lines of development involved a criticism of them and a demand for their alteration. We do not know why such sensitiveness should have been directed to just these details of differentiation. (Freud, 1921c, p. 102)

Gabbard (1993) suggests that Freud's (1918a) concept of narcissism of minor differences "can be extended by recognizing the fundamental narcissistic need to preserve a sense of oneself as an autonomous individual" (p. 232). Thus, Freud's remarks may also reflect, in my view, a state of pain, injury, or sense of alienation due to narcissistic sensitivity to a deviation from the familiar, a deviation that initiates resistance against these alien stimulations (Solan, 1991, 1998a, 1998b, 1999, and Chapter Two).

Narcissism, the self, and object relations

I believe that the emerging sense of self is immunised by narcissistic processing as self-familiarity, and that both self and narcissism are inspired by, and evolve, during the course of object relations.

Most theories deal with narcissism as bound to the self and to representations of the self or the object, while the differences among the concepts of object relations, self, and narcissism seem to have become blurred.

Based on the insights of ego psychology, Hartmann (1950) differentiated, for the first time, the ego from the self and the ideal ego from the ideal self. Hartmann defined the ego as a mental structure (an apparatus with different functions), the self as the overall personality, and narcissism as a libidinal investment; this time, however, not in the ego as Freud had done, but in the self. Since Freud, we can see a constant attitude of attributing to narcissism the libidinal investment, while the variant element is the object of the narcissistic libidinal investment. Annie Reich (1953) considered the narcissistic libidinal investments to be in self-representations and not in the actual self and claimed that "positive evaluation of the self obviously is a precondition for one's well-being" (1960, p. 215). Since then, Kohut (1971) redefined narcissism as a positive investment in the developing self.

On the foundations of self-psychology, Kohut (1966, 1971, 1977) promoted three leading issues of the self:

a. The existence of a separate "core self" as a cohesive cluster of all its components.
b. Normal psychic development depends on the cohesion of the self and is differentiated from narcissistic personality disorders.
c. The maintenance of self-esteem is the best defence against narcissistic fragility. The concept of "the sense of a core self" was further elaborated by Stern (1985), and "results from the integration of … four basic self-experiences" (p. 71), namely, agency, coherence, affectivity and history.

Although most psychoanalysts tend to accept the mutual influence between object relations and narcissism, as well as their impact on the formation of the child's self, a perceptional divergence still exists regarding the pattern of object relations in early life. Some psychoanalysts, such as Chasseguet-Smirgel (1975), Stern (1985), Emde (1988a, 1988b), Fonagy & Target (2002), and others, myself included, consider that the newborn differentiates himself from the non-self from the beginning of his life. In opposition to these, others, such as Kernberg (1975), Mahler & McDevitt (1968), Kohut (1971, 1977), Stolorow (1975), and their followers, assert that the infant does *not* differentiate himself from the non-self early in life, and lives as if he were in a symbiotic fusion or narcissistic merger with the object. All agree, however, that the narcissistic relationships and the choice of the narcissistic object are the result of a denial or disavowal of separateness between self and object.

Mahler (1968) describes primary narcissism as “normal autism” in the first weeks of life, in that “the infant seems to be in a state of primitive hallucinatory disorientation, in which need satisfaction belongs to his own omnipotent, autistic orbit”. Mahler assumes that the baby does not yet differentiate himself from the non-self, although she claims that “the infant tries to rid himself of unpleasurable tension” (p. 200). From the second month onwards, “the infant behaves and functions as though he and his mother were an omnipotent system—a dual unity within one common boundary”. This “normal symbiosis” describes a “state of undifferentiation, of fusion with mother, in which the ‘I’ is not yet differentiated from the ‘not-I’” (p. 201).

Kohut (1971) claims that normal development is based on the cohesion of the self, which is achieved through the parent being emotionally available to match the baby’s needs as his self-object. An individual who is unable to perceive the object as a separate other desperately needs or craves the presence of the self-object to maintain his self-survival. Kohut and his followers postulate a developmental line of self-objects, from archaic to mature.

Fonagy & Target (1997, 2002) coined the enlightening concept of the “mentalization of situations” describing the child’s capacity to reflect and think about emotional situations. They view this capacity as being dependent on the parent’s ability to acknowledge that his or her child’s inner world needs to be understood according to his individuality.

Healthy versus pathological narcissism

It is generally agreed that narcissism is an important element of the human emotional system, but, in my view, the psychoanalytic literature has not sufficiently elucidated how it operates, what its purpose and significance are, and how to differentiate normal narcissism from its pathological processing or operation. Freud perceived normal narcissism as “self-love [that] works for the preservation of the individual” (1921c, p. 102). The individual “withdraws libidinal interest from his love-objects [when he suffers] … and sends them out again when he recovers … we should behave in just the same way” (Freud, 1914c, p. 82). Other views consider normal narcissism as: regulation of self-esteem

(Reich, 1960); acceptance of one's imperfections and the limits of one's ideals (Duruz, 1981; Reich, 1960); a matching between the perception of reality and positive self-esteem (Van der Waals, 1965); positive self and object representations, based on primarily positive experiences in early childhood (Schafer, 1968); maintenance of self-cohesion (Kohut, 1971); maintenance of "the structural cohesiveness, temporal stability and positive affective coloring of the self-representation" (Stolorow, 1975, p. 179); investment of libido in an integrative structure of the self (Kernberg, 1975, 1984); and a mental process that distinguishes the individual from others (Duruz, 1981).

"When self-esteem is threatened, significantly lowered or destroyed, then narcissistic activities are called into play in an effort to protect, restore, repair and stabilize it" (Stolorow, 1975, p. 183). These may be understood as continuous reparative measures (Kohut, 1977; Reich, 1960).

Reich stresses, "narcissism per se is a normal phenomenon. It becomes pathologic only under certain conditions: e.g., when the balance between object cathexis and self-cathexis has become disturbed, and objects are cathected insufficiently or not at all" (1960, p. 216), as well as when "an enormous overvaluation of the body or particular organs" takes place (p. 222). "Narcissistic pathology becomes especially noticeable in the methods used for self-esteem regulation" (p. 216). Stolorow (1975) adds that healthy narcissism may be differentiated from unhealthy narcissism in functional terms according to "whether or not it succeeds in maintaining a cohesive, stable and positively colored self-representation" (p. 184). Finally, McClelland (2004) considers narcissism as a dimension of normal human psychosocial development and normal functional structure. He discusses narcissism under three broad headings: economic, emotional elation and emotional anxiety.

Most of the professional literature, however, deals with the pathological side of narcissism. Freud (1905d, in a footnote to the *Three Essays*) describes narcissism as perverse libidinal development. Later, (1914c) he refers to secondary narcissism as a potential source of pathology, when libido retreats from the object to the self/ego.

Since 1960, and especially from 1980 onward, Reich, Kohut, Kernberg and others have tended to view narcissism in terms of personality disorders. Kohut (1971) assumes that the pathology does not lie in the narcissism, but rather in the damaged or missing structure capable of maintaining self-cohesiveness. He locates the aetiology of