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Review of  
**Eagle M (2011) From Classical to Contemporary Psychoanalysis.**  
New York, Routledge  
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For an eager reader of many papers and books that promise to present a new view on old issues, this text by Morris Eagle stands out for many good reasons. Just by taking a look on the blurbs one finds astonishing statements: In Joe Schachter's view the book „demonstrates a unique talent for presenting a remarkably lucid, largely jargon free, comprehensive, sympathetic delineation of Freud's oeuvre in approximately 100 pages“; Peter Fonagy calls it a masterpiece of conceptual integration,... the best guide to the development of modern psychoanalytic thinking“ and Paul Wachtel writes that the book is essential reading for anyone who wishes to understand deeply the ferment with in psychoanalysis and the theoretical options that resides with its borders“.

The text is organized around four fundamental topics of psychoanalytic theory and practice: 1. Conceptions of mind, 2. Conceptions of object relations, 3. Conception of psychopathology and 4. Conceptions of treatment. The first part of the book spells out how Freudian theory addresses each of these topics; the second part then critically examines how contemporary psychoanalytic theories address each of these fundamental topics.

I have to admit that studying the third part on „divergences and convergences“ allowed me to fully appreciate the richness of the exposition of the Freudian work in part I and its further development in the various schools of thought in part II.

So I shall focus on some illuminating discussions in part III to provide the reader with a sense of what the richness of the text is made of.

The vision of enlightenment that Eagle attributes to the classical position clearly is a favourite topic of his evaluation. There he identifies a strong cultural pattern, that lets him, like Hoffman does, speak of a mini-paradigm shift:

„I would suggest that the contemporary psychoanalytic attitude toward uncovering truth and the privileging of the therapeutic relationship.....is not simply attributable to clinical experience but is also an expression of the cultural-philosophical zeitgeist“ (p.251).

In this vein it is not surprising that the relational psychoanalytic world has not yet produced anything like systematic outcome studies to endorse the claim to provide a better psychoanalytic experience.

The concept of mind, in Eagle's view, clearly is at par in classical and contemporary visions. He points out that contemporary theories by rejecting drive theory reject the conceptions of mind as a discharge apparatus. This entails also a critique that they do not provide „any systematic account of the development of reality testing“ (p. 252).

However Eagle is keenly aware that there is a great deal of infant research that endorses the view that reality testing more likely should be seen as an inborn capacity. Here and elsewhere in the book Eagle from time to time includes references to findings that might help to decide which conceptions are more in resonance with findings from basic research that psychoanalysis has to take into account.

Debating the status of unconscious processes Eagle identifies the most fundamental and radical divergence between classical and relational conceptions (p.253). He makes us aware that „the cornerstone Freudian concept of repression has virtually disappeared“ from contemporary discussions, replaced by an emphasis on dissociation which may be linked to a „renewed interest in trauma“. The impact of baby watching and attachment research has led to a reshaping of unconscious configurations that are acquired in preverbal modes experiencing and are no longer the outcome of defensive activities. The notion of implicit learning has replaced Freud's „cauldron full of seething excitation“.

Still Eagle identifies also areas of convergences when discussing the conceptions of mind. In his view the concept of conflict has stood the test of time which still has implications for treatment. „Adaptive resolution of conflict“ has remained a goal for treatment. He sees clear agreement that Freud's (1926) formulation of the role of danger situations still informs „what mental contents can become conscious“ (p. 255) and what not maintaining the basic idea that early parental reactions shape the range of later experience.

In his discussion of the nature and origin of object relations Eagle states a clear divergence between the Freudian view and the contemporary view. He sides clearly with the evidence that it is increasingly difficult

„to portray young infants as encased in a shell of primary narcissism, seeking hallucinatory wish-fulfillments, incapable of any degree of reality-testing, and forced to turn to objects and take account of reality by the demands of drive gratification.“ (p. 256) However Eagle maintains that there is enough convergences on the central idea „that the object serves the vital function of regulating tension and affect state“ (p. 257) His discussion bring together Kohut, Fairbairn and attachment which he sees in agreement with empirical findings he presented in an earlier chapter. He then strongly criticizes as unnecessary the dichotomy between object-seeking and pleasure-seeking in infant-caregiver attachment:

„One needs to acknowledge the failure of classical theory to recognize our inborn object relational nature while at the same time acknowledging the failure of contemporary theories to recognize the role of various forms of regulation and pleasure in influencing the object(s) to whom the infant becomes attached.“ (p.259)

This statement - to me - conveys quite precisely the message of the whole text; being critical in both directions and at the same time it is a convincing effort at reconciliation. Careful reading, sifting through foundational texts, allows for an integrative view which often is backed by references to basic research as arbiter.

The ensuing discussions of the conceptions of psychopathology and last not least on implications for treatment masterly pursue the same task. Eagle uses his scholarship, his wide knowledge of the field to finally diagnose reductionism in psychoanalytic theorizing. He states that „there is a goodly degree of convergence in the *form or structure* of theorizing between classical and contemporary psychoanalytic theories“ (p. 291)

He recommends „to resist the reductionist impulse, recognize the multiplicity of motivational systems, and devote once's efforts to understanding how these different systems interact and become integrated (or fail to become integrated) with each other“. (p. 292)

This book hopefully will generate lively discussions among diverse camps if its strength are well consumed.

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