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# Personal Relations Theory

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Fairbairn, Macmurray and Suttie

Graham S. Clarke

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rejected libidinal–anti-libidinal relationship may be reviewed for its reality based badness or desirability.

(1991: 608–9)

The powers that were split-off and repressed into the subsidiary selves are retrieved and reintegrated into the repertoire of the now more realistic central self and the degree of splitting is reduced coincident with an increase in the capacity for objectivity of the central self and its now more realistic ideal object/ego ideal.

I have argued that there is a distinctive thread of Scottish object relations thinking that could be developed by critically comparing the work of Ian D. Suttie, Ronald Fairbairn and John Macmurray. This work probably has its roots in the Scottish Enlightenment. This perspective, which I call Personal Relations Theory, a term suggested by Fairbairn but never used, in order to distinguish it from object relations theory, which is more immediately associated with Klein than Fairbairn, could, I believe, provide the basis for a psychoanalytic theory that is consistent with critical realism.

As a final comment I would like to draw attention to the importance that Roy Bhaskar has placed upon the idea of unconditional love in his discussion of ethics where he says, 'we may yet win through to a world in which we can live in a stance of unconditional love for ourselves and each other and for every other being (or for that matter non-being) in our environment' (2000: 18). The reason this is important for me is that at the beginning of Fairbairn's development of his mature theory (in the early to middle 1940s), his 1940 paper on 'Schizoid factors in the personality' argues that the worst thing that can happen to a newborn infant short of death is to come to feel, '(a) that he is not really loved for himself as a person by his mother, and (b) that his own love for his mother is not really valued and accepted by her' (1952a: 17). This trauma is at the seat of all subsequent schizoid manifestations in the person's thought and experience. Unconditional love, on the other hand, is an essential component in the care of children and in the prevention of pathological splitting whose long-term consequences can be so devastating to our ways of thinking and being.

## Chapter 9

# The politics of attachment theory and personal relations theory: Fairbairn, Suttie and Bowlby

By the mid-1990s attachment theory was a well-developed and successful, scientifically based, research programme into *forms of attachment* – their distribution across the population and the variety of their forms – and, *reflective functioning* – the ability to achieve a consistent and coherent narrative about your own life, self and experiences with significant others. In *The Politics of Uncertainty* (Marris 1996) and *The Politics of Attachment* (Kroemer and Roberts 1996) these developed findings were used to look at the consequences for national politics and the development of the welfare state. The overall conclusions, that secure attachments make for a happier and more productive civil society, is beginning to be recognised in the measures that the UK government is taking to protect children, in particular, from poverty and deprivation. In 1996, in her introduction to *The Politics of Attachment*, Patricia Hewitt<sup>1</sup> wrote, 'The free marketeers forgot something which Adam Smith himself never forgot: that markets depend upon non-market institutions, on trust, on relationships between people and within communities, on norms of good behaviour, on social capital. Destroy that and not only do you damage efficiency, you also destroy the conditions for a good life' (Kroemer and Roberts 1996).

In regard to attachment theory I will be arguing that Bowlby was directly and fundamentally influenced by both Suttie and Fairbairn and that, as we have already seen, infant development researchers like Trevarthen (2002) and Stern (1985), whose work is often cited in support of Bowlby, were directly influenced by Macmurray whose work is also strongly related to both Suttie and Fairbairn. As such it is perhaps curious that when attachment theory is discussed in relation to national politics by psychoanalytically oriented commentators (Holmes 1996; Rustin 1996) the connection with the work of Suttie, Fairbairn and Macmurray isn't acknowledged. Perhaps worse is the failure to mention Fairbairn or Suttie in connection with the development of 'British object relations' and apparently to incorporate Bowlby into an essentially Kleinian tradition (Rustin 1996). Bowlby himself is a much better guide to his own antecedents and affiliations in his foreword to *The Origins of Love and Hate*, where he writes 'Suttie, Ferenczi, Hermann and the Balins] ...

saw the infant as striving from the first to relate to his mother, and his future mental health as turning on the success or failure of this first relationship. Thus was the object relations version of psychoanalysis born' (Bowlby 1988a: xvii). Regarding another deep-running debate in psychoanalysis concerning the role of 'real-life events and situations', Bowlby gives a further brief account of the development of object relations psychoanalysis as he sees it:

Influenced in varying degrees by the initiative of the Hungarian analysts, the main advocates of the object relations paradigm have been Melanie Klein and a number of native-born Britons given to independent thinking, of whom Ronald Fairbairn and Donald Winnicott are the best known. In addition to Ian Suttie, another in the group is Harry Guntrip and I count myself yet another. In North America Harry Stack Sullivan and Heinz Kohut are the best known representatives. With the notable exception of Melanie Klein, all those named have held explicitly that most differences in individual development that are of consequence to mental health are to be traced either to differences in the way children are treated by their parents or else to separations from or losses of parent-figures to whom the children have become attached.

(Bowlby 1988a: xvi)

While Holmes in his book on attachment theory (1993) acknowledges the influences of Suttie and Fairbairn on Bowlby, in his contribution to *The Politics of Attachment* (Holmes 1996) he quotes Winnicott: 'Thus adults and infants are programmed to bond to one another for survival's sake', paraphrasing Suttie's much earlier conclusion, which is rehearsed by Bowlby in his foreword, 'Instead of an armament of instincts latent or otherwise ... [the child] is born with a simple attachment-to-mother who is the sole source of food and protection ... the need for mother is primarily presented to the child mind as a need for company and as a discomfort in isolation' (1988a: xvii).

The first part of this chapter shows how Fairbairn's model of mind and Bowlby's internal working models of mother might be reconciled and provides a personal relations view of both forms of attachment and reflective functioning. From there the use of object relations theory as political theory will be considered. Central to this process will be an attempt to show the relevance of Fairbairn's idea of mature dependence for personal relations theory as political theory.

## SINGLE OR MULTIPLE SELVES: FAIRBAIRN AND ATTACHMENT THEORY

There is a history of tension between attachment theory and psychoanalysis even if, or perhaps because, the principal proponent of attachment theory in

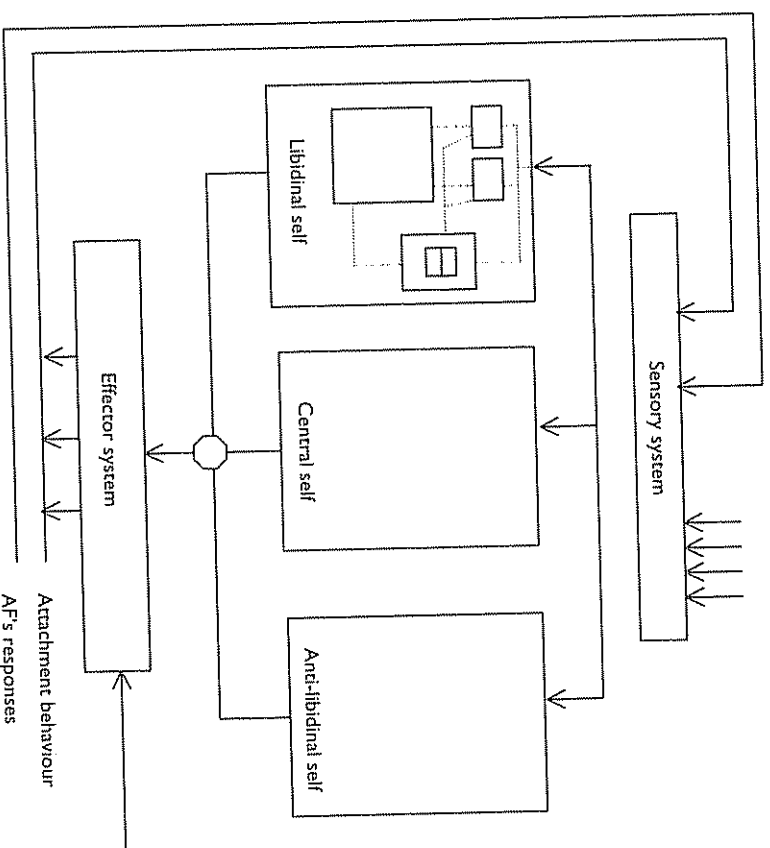
the late 1950s was John Bowlby, a practising analyst. Bowlby always saw attachment theory as a variety of object relations theory (Breherton 1998: 132) and continued to practise as a psychoanalyst throughout his professional life (Steele and Steele 1998a: 96). Bowlby's ideas on attachment theory led to what one commentator (Slade 2000: 1148) has called his 'virtual expulsion' from the British Psychoanalytic Society. However, empirically based work on attachment theory by developmental psychologists, and the introduction of new concepts and tools into the research by Mary Ainsworth and Mary Main, among others, has meant that there is a rich body of scientific work concerning the early development of children and their relationship with significant others that could be of great benefit to psychoanalysis as a supplement to both its theory and practice. Recently there has been a call for a rapprochement between attachment theory and psychoanalysis (Steele and Steele 1998a). This call recognises the overlapping concerns of the two disciplines and asks for some consideration of the implications for psychoanalysis of the development of this scientific work over the past 40 plus years.

I am interested in this rapprochement because I believe that Bowlby's theory is closer to Fairbairn's 'psychology of dynamic structure' than to any other psychoanalytic theory,<sup>2</sup> and that this parallel is inadequately understood by some of the people discussing this rapprochement. Bowlby himself always recognised the similarity of perspective between himself and Fairbairn, as I will demonstrate later. Because Fairbairn's model is not widely understood, however, the deeper parallels have for the most part gone unnoticed. Indeed, so little known is his work in some quarters that in recent discussions Cassidy could argue that 'The object relations theorists were able to acknowledge the importance of early relationships with significant people while at the same time maintaining a place for Freud's drive theory' (Cassidy 1998: 121). This is not true of Fairbairn or Suttie, who explicitly opposed Freud's drive theory long before Bowlby formulated attachment theory. Similarly Lyons-Ruth can maintain that 'Previous object relations theorists had been deferential to the need to emphasise the distortions of intrapsychic fantasy and too respectful of the need to develop more fully the theoretical implications of a break with drive theory. While many contemplated the cliff, only Bowlby made the leap' (1998: 128). Again, not true, as Fairbairn and Suttie not only opposed drive theory but also opposed Klein's insistence upon innate aggressive and envious tendencies, as we have seen in previous chapters. The fact that Steele and Steele, in their call for rapprochement, only consider Anna Freud, Melanie Klein and Margaret Mahler is unwitting testimony to the success with which the Freudian and Kleinian wings of the British Psychoanalytic Society have kept major aspects of the Independents' legacy from a wider public, and is a further justification for attempting to draw attention to Fairbairn and Suttie's work.

When Fairbairn does get considered explicitly, and his influence on, or parallels with, Bowlby are discussed, as is the case of Inge Bretherton (1987,

1998), his full model is not used. Only a high level characterisation of Fairbairn's model is used, and it is differences at this level that are considered. Important as these may be, the appropriate level of comparison, as far as I am concerned, would involve, at the very least, a discussion of the relationship between the internal working model of mother, one of the fundamental mechanisms of attachment theory, and the multiple dynamic structures of Fairbairn which resolve themselves into three alternative selves, each based upon object relationships with mother or principal caregiver. It is only when a comparison at this level has been carried out that the deep parallels between the two approaches – Bowlby's and Fairbairn's – can be seen. It is in this light too that Main's essay on multiple models (1991) considering Bowlby's own call for multiple internal working models of mother (1973: 203–9) can begin to suggest a different model to that of a single internal working model of mother and thus be compared to Fairbairn's multiple-self model. As Main herself notes, Bowlby sees multiple internal working models of mother, some of which are unconscious, as directly parallel to the notion of an inner reality with a dynamic unconscious: 'the hypothesis of multiple models, one of which is highly influential but relatively or completely unconscious, is no more than a version, in different terms, of Freud's hypothesis of a dynamic unconscious' (Bowlby 1973: 205). In Chapter 3 I considered the work of Donald Davidson on pathologies of irrationality in which he argues for the partitioning of the mind into self-consistent person-like entities with coherent beliefs and desires in a model which is based in Freud's structural theory but, as I argue, closer in tone to Fairbairn's own structural theory.

In *A Secure Base* Bowlby points to the similarity between an internal working model of mother and an internal object and to the ways in which, with multiple internal working models of mother, the processes of splitting and internal dynamics can manifest themselves (1988b: 120n). Main's paper suggests reasons why multiple internal working models of mother or primary caregiver might arise and the way that this might provide insight into the insecure-avoidant form of attachment. Steele and Steele (1998a) argue that Klein has provided us with an account of the internal world of the insecure-disorganised infant. If we were to adopt a similar approach, it may be argued that Fairbairn's multiple-self model is a good account of the internal world of the insecure-avoidant and/or the insecure-ambivalent child. Should this sort of argument be pursued we would have a variety of different attachment patterns, each associated with a different psychoanalytic theory, and the existing and manifest contradictions between these psychoanalytic theories would militate against any coherent psychoanalytic model of attachment behaviour as a whole. I believe that there is an alternative to this and in order to illustrate it I will use the diagram of an internal working model of mother (see Figure 9.1), as developed by Inge Bretherton (1987), as part of a representation of an inner reality like that described by Fairbairn, already familiar from earlier chapters. In other words there will be three internal working models of



A diagram of multiple internal working models based on Bretherton's 1987 diagram and organised in a similar way to Fairbairn's model of inner reality divided into three separate selves each based upon a working model of mother.

Figure 9.1 Bretherton's (1987) model modified to emulate Fairbairn's model of inner reality.

mother operating in parallel and outputting their results onto the same effector space or vector.

Input via the senses goes to all the internal working models and each independently, and in parallel, decides what action to take. Each working model outputs signals to the effectors as and when it feels it is necessary. If each of these internal working models of mother was of equal power and importance but based upon significantly different expectations and responses due to previous patterns of object relationships then you might get a stream of contradictory signals to the effectors that would produce apparently contradictory behaviours. This would be more like the pattern of disorganised attachment behaviour. If the central self, based upon good object relations, was well established and the relative strength of the subsidiary selves was

low, then the frequency and likelihood of contributions from the less well established subsidiary selves interfering with the central self's ability for secure attachment would be small. Insecure-avoidant and insecure-ambivalent patterns might arise if one or other of the subsidiary selves, based upon over-exciting or over-rejecting object relations, was both well established and triggered by circumstances. The suggestion here is that there is no need to dichotomise coherent and incoherent responses into single *or* multiple working model theories.

Fairbairn's theory suggests that some degree of splitting is inevitable, and the attachment behaviours that are clearly documented and explored may all be the product of a model of multiple internal working models, where, because of prior object relationships, the different internal working models are differently developed and more or less well repressed. Splitting of the self is a matter of degree, and Fairbairn's theory of development suggests that the internal working model of mother and significant caregivers laid down in early childhood can be undone later by making the split-off selves conscious and producing a central self of greater coherence by reintegrating the split-off object relationships into that central self. This also seems to me to coincide with the idea that developmental psychologists have suggested, of developing better models of others as part of the necessary development of the child. In this case, however, it isn't just a matter of developing specific skills but a process of reordering essentially primitive working models of self and (m)other into a coherent view of things. Psychic growth in this model means that the central self grows *at the expense* of the subsidiary selves. It is also worth mentioning that each of these putative selves offers a focus of control that can give rise to precisely the forms of narrative, coherent or incoherent, explored using the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) (George *et al.* 1985).

Steele and Steele argue that there is 'no unified perspective which may be called the contemporary psychoanalytic form' (1998b: 138-9), but I am suggesting here that there is considerable overlap between Bowlby and Fairbairn, investigation of which could perhaps provide such a perspective. The following is a short list of some of the most striking parallels between the two theories:

- 1 against drive theory and for a relational theory
- 2 notion of self and other based upon the internalisation of object relations with real mother or primary caregiver
- 3 importance of real-world relationships and experience
- 4 defensive splitting of self and repression of alternative sub-selves in order to preserve good relations with primary caregiver
- 5 internal structure based upon multiple internal models of relations with mother or primary caregiver
- 6 lifelong importance of early object relations with significant others
- 7 development as a matter of reinterpreting and reintegrating previously rejected (primitive) object relations based sub-selves into central self.

The single central and important difference between Fairbairn and Bowlby is that Bowlby saw attachment as a biological process or mechanism while Fairbairn opposed Freud's drive theory and any other biologically based theory on the grounds that it was not a psychological and personal explanation, that is, it was not at an appropriate level for the subject matter under investigation – a person. This is a view he shared with John Macnamara who, in *Persons in Relation*, puts forward a developmental schema that might well provide useful common ground to both approaches (see Chapter 8). Of particular interest in the light of the arguments about the importance of fear in the development of the insecure-disorganised pattern (Hesse and Main 2000) is Macnamara's argument that hatred is a derived and not a fundamental aspect of human beings' motivation (1995b), which he identifies as love and fear. This has striking parallels with Fairbairn's argument concerning the derived nature of aggression and is in both cases diametrically opposed to the Kleinian account of these issues.

## FAIRBAIRN AND BOWLBY

There is no doubt that attachment theory was influenced by Fairbairn's object relations theory. John Bowlby acknowledges as much in the founding text of attachment theory, his three-volume work *Attachment and Loss* (1969-80). In the second volume, *Separation*, Bowlby explicitly acknowledges the similarities between his own position and Fairbairn's. In relation to the idea that aggression is a response to frustration he writes, 'The position consistently adopted by the present writer . . . is close to Fairbairn's' (256). And in regard to the general concept that psychopathology is directly related to separation anxiety he writes that, 'Fairbairn's main theoretical position . . . is in all other respects consistent with the theory of frustrated attachment advanced here' (397), the differences being 'peripheral' to Fairbairn's main theory. In relation to Fairbairn's developmental schema of the move from infantile to mature dependency, Bowlby notes that his theoretical position of a 'secure base and strong family support' as essential to maturity 'has much in common with positions adopted by a number of other psychoanalysts, especially those who give substantial weight to the influence of the environment on development' (360). His first example is Fairbairn and he quotes approvingly Fairbairn's (1952a) argument that 'any theory of ego-development that is to be satisfactory must be conceived in terms of relationships with objects' . . . [and] that during an individual's development "an original state of infantile dependence . . . is abandoned in favour of a state of adult or mature dependence"' (360-1).

Attachment theory is an intra-personal theory; it is about the dependence of people upon each other and the ways that their ability to cope with the world realistically and creatively can be disturbed and damaged by a disruption of

their attachments to significant others. These patterns of attachment are established during infancy but operate throughout life. There is reference to an intra-psychic component in the form of internalised working models of mother and infant but this remains underdeveloped. Fairbairn's theory also stresses the crucial importance of significant others, our object-directedness, which he calls dependence, and the importance of dependence throughout life. But, he also has a well-developed model of inner reality with internalised working models of mother and child as part of the endopsychic structure he argues is common to us all. There is a direct relationship between endopsychic structure and dependence and the move from infantile to mature dependence involves changes in endopsychic structure.

### FAIRBAIRN'S PSYCHOLOGY OF DYNAMIC STRUCTURE AND ATTACHMENT BEHAVIOUR

I will be arguing that the different forms of attachment can be seen to be specific configurations and economies of a dynamic endopsychic structure. This provides a unifying overview of these phenomena within personal relations theory which are accounted for within attachment theory by an essentially biological concept of attachment and internal working models of mother or the primary caregiver.

In his late work, *A Secure Base*, Bowlby (1988b) still refers to the concept of 'working models of self and other' as the underlying mechanism and structure of inner reality that would provide an explanatory framework for the different patterns of attachment. Fairbairn's psychology of dynamic structure is founded upon the idea that the central ego and its ideal object, the anti-libidinal ego and its (rejecting) object and the libidinal ego and its (exciting) object are all based upon internalised relationships of self to mother or primary caregiver, with appropriate affective colouring. And given the primacy of the emotional in these approaches it would be truer to say they are situated emotional relationships; that, in short, splitting makes these dynamic structures into three different working models of the (emotional) relationship with mother.<sup>2</sup>

Attachment theory and associated research have discovered that different forms of attachment to different significant others is possible. For example, the infant might be attached differently to mother and father. As discussed in Chapter 2, within Fairbairn's theory this is both accounted for, and enabled by, a process in which the child is actively discriminating, and internalises and organises aspects of its relationships with significant others, among these three internal structures. Fairbairn describes this most clearly in his discussion of the Oedipus situation, which he sees as a social situation. Here the many and varied internalised relationships with mother, father and others are sorted and organised between the different selves (central, libidinal and

anti-libidinal) and the resulting configuration can mimic the conventional Oedipus situation (1944) but is also capable of producing a variety of other configurations. In this way the gender identification of the child is related to both patterns of attachment and the child's own active choice amongst alternative ways of being that is, however, socially constrained.

In my view Fairbairn's psychology of dynamic structure is a strong candidate for a clear and coherent model of inner reality based upon 'working models of self and others'. This theory then should have something to say about the underlying mechanisms producing the observationally determined variety of patterns of attachment. In Fairbairn's view the degree to which the pristine ego (self) becomes split into central, libidinal and anti-libidinal selves is directly related to the early relationship with mother or primary caregiver. Since splitting in this case is not just a splitting of the object into acceptable (good) or over-exciting or over-rejecting (bad) aspects but also a splitting and repressing of aspects of the ego too, the degree of splitting will also reflect the degree of pathology, in the sense of powers (resources, abilities) no longer available to the infant because repressed. All structure generating splitting is a diminution of the powers available to the self (central). Splitting here is a defensive move to protect and sustain the crucial relationship with the primary caregiver.

Within the category of secure attachment one could argue that the degree of splitting, the harshness of the splitting, the degree to which the repressed libidinal and anti-libidinal selves are active, is minimal. The central self is dominant and available and determines the overall response of the child to the situation without any undue interference from the subsidiary selves. (It is worth noting here that this is close to the original activity of the pristine ego in that it is directed towards an outer object on which it is also dependent.) This process is always going to be subject to wider cultural constraints and does not represent an absolute since it is possible that in some cultures even the normal protest of a securely attached infant could be regarded as pathological and social mores could be different. The differences between a culture in which crying was (a) good for the baby, (b) bad for the baby or (c) a potential communication from the baby, would produce quite different ways of handling the situation (and the baby). So, in a non-absolutist way, secure attachment would be the equivalent of a low degree of splitting in the endopsychic structure.

What then of the other forms of attachment that have been described: can they too be represented using Fairbairn's model of endopsychic structure? I would argue that they can, since a higher degree of splitting between the different structures reflects a greater degree of inconsistency, or difference, in the ways the child has been responded to, and consequently a greater degree of autonomy to the split-off selves, so that one or other, or both, might be activated by the 'Strange Situation'.

The underlying model for the libidinal self is over-exciting relationships



and the underlying model for the anti-ibidinal self is over-rejecting relationships, so different sorts of behaviours would be produced by one or other of these dynamic structures becoming ascendant in response to a real-world situation. Anxiously attached infants exhibit a variety of forms of behaviour that in attachment theory are classified as avoidant or ambivalent. In avoidant attachment the infant treats mother's behaviour as a rejection and then itself mirrors this behaviour by rejecting mother upon her return. In ambivalently attached children there is an oscillation between behaviour that is similar to secure attachment and behaviour that is similar to avoidant attachment. This suggests that there are different degrees of splitting between the avoidant and the ambivalently attached child, depending upon the degree to which the anti-ibidinal self has been developed through relationships with the caregiver; the avoidant child being more used to feeling rejected and consequently more likely to reject the caregiver in order to avoid the risk of being rejected again.

In the case of disorganised attachment which has also been recognised as a category of behavioural response to the 'Strange Situation', the infant doesn't respond consistently to separation but produces a variety of different responses to the situation, some of which appear bizarre. This sort of response suggests that there is no clear dominance of any one of the dynamic structures of inner reality. This could mean that the endopsychic structure is more radically split than in the other cases and that the locus of action is being transferred between the three selves to some degree or another. This can be compared to the manic phase that precedes the establishment of the basic endopsychic structure discussed earlier in the book. However, it could also be argued that the so-called bizarre behaviour of the disorganised infant is the product of the ascendancy of the ibidinal (over-exciting) self and that the technique adopted is a form of exciting behaviour where one can forget one's anxiety by distracting oneself from it.

At this point it would be useful to consider Gergely and Watson's (1996) work on bio-social feedback and affect-mirroring to see if aspects of their research into emotion regulation might be used to give some clearer description of the types of relationship with the primary caregiver that could be argued to form the core of the dynamic structures of Fairbairn's psychology. It is the creation of the basic endopsychic structure through the splitting and repression of subsidiary selves that is the major mechanism of emotion regulation at this stage of development in Fairbairn's theory, following an initial period of primary identification and incorporation. In Gergely and Watson's paper the notions of mirroring (Winnicott 1971) and containing (Bion 1962) are described as 'affect-mirroring' and the process is described in such a way that particular forms of affect-mirroring can lead to both the calming of a distressed infant and an increase in that infant's sense of self-control over its own emotions. The processes of 'contingency detection' and 'maximisation' elegantly account for such results and could be posited as the processes of the core relationship internalised by the central self.

Gergely and Watson also identify two pathologies of affect-mirroring, one in which distorted or inconsistent mirroring takes place, and the other in which mirroring is absent and the caregiver responds with a display of their own emotion. In both these cases one can see how the response of the caregiver could be interpreted as a rejection or a frustration. Not being seen for who one is or being responded to by the other in an angry, depressed or a distracted way, a way that is not interactive, would create the core feeling of frustration and rejection that is characteristic of the anti-ibidinal self. Linking this back to an interpretation of attachment behaviours in terms of Fairbairn's model, we could argue that good enough affect-mirroring (infantile dependence in Fairbairn's terms<sup>4</sup>) will encourage healthy development of the central self and that pathologies of affect-mirroring will encourage development of the anti-ibidinal self. Drawing on Fairbairn's model and assuming that the absence of mirroring is more frustrating and rejecting than not being mirrored realistically, we might speculate that the difference between ambivalent and avoidant attachment could be at least partly accounted for by the degree to which absence or unpredictability of mirroring is prevalent in early experiences of the caregiver: detachment, unwillingness, or inability to mirror, signifying potential pathology in the caregiver. The Adult Attachment Interview identifies the form of attachment that the parent or potential parent of a child has from the coherence or otherwise of the narrative they are able to provide of their own lives and attachment figures. Long-term studies suggest that the unborn child's future attachment patterns at one year are predictable from the expectant parent's AAI responses, and that inter-generational transmission of attachment patterns takes place predominantly through attachment to mother despite the fact that different forms of attachment can develop in relation to different attachment figures, for example mother and father. It is in this way, it is argued, that attachment patterns, secure and insecure, are passed on from parent to child.

When it comes to the development of the ibidinal self, with the notion of over-exciting relationships at its core, it is interesting to note that Gergely and Watson describe another strategy of emotion regulation called 'distraction-soothing' that would seem to be a candidate for the core relationship of the ibidinal ego. When distraction-soothing is a predominant form of engagement, some form of exciting or shocking impingement upon the infant is used to try and distract them from their current concerns. This apparently works to some degree but also increases the sense of impingement on the infant by outside forces and when taken to extremes might be consistent with disorganised attachment and its associated bizarre behaviour.

I suggest that it is useful to think about the connections between such strategies for emotion regulation and the dynamic structures associated with Fairbairn's model of endopsychic structure and ways these might be used to account for different categories of attachment. In particular the strategy of distraction-soothing does seem to be a precursor to both manic ways of



dealing with conflict and the development of aspects of creative activity where apparently unconnected categories or contexts are invoked and juxtaposed for the creation of new insights, humour or play. It is important to stress that under normal circumstances these different strategies of emotion regulation do not in and of themselves inevitably lead to splitting; it is a degree of repetition, predominance and severity that is likely to contribute to that. The sort of disturbed behaviour that produces disorganised attachment is severe and traumatic; a black parody of distraction-soothing as described by Gergely and Watson. Some of the phenomenology of experience within extreme sports seems to fit this model: the presence of a force that is much more powerful than yourself, that picks you up and could dash you down and kill you, but which, as in the case of the child thrown into the air and then caught, produces fear followed by a rush of good feeling at having survived such a potentially life-threatening situation.

## THE POLITICS OF ATTACHMENT AND PERSONAL RELATIONS THEORY

Having demonstrated how, within personal relations theory, a psychoanalytic interpretation of both attachment and reflexive function are possible, it is now time to consider what in this light they might mean. Rustin (2001) has argued that both the Strange Situation and the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) are powerful and legitimate scientific tools, but given the personal relations theory interpretation of them, what is it that they are measuring?

I believe that what the Strange Situation and the AAI measure is the degree of splitting in the inner reality of the person, what other strands within object relations psychoanalysis might call the degree of integration. Underlying this interpretation is the view that secure attachment is a precursor to, in the case of the infant, or an indicator of, in the case of the adult, mature dependence, or more accurately the capacity for mature dependence since, as I will argue, mature dependence is a social and communal relationship of people to each other which, in any particular social formation, may not be readily available. It should be noted that secure attachment is independent of family form, social class and national or cultural origins or location.

What then of the 'politics of attachment'? In works that address the question directly (Marris 1996, Kroemer and Roberts 1996) the clear subtext is related to 'security' and 'uncertainty'. This seems to be prompted in the main by Bowlby's characterisation of 'a secure base' as it is expanded to include all of the institutions of society. However, the UK remains a class-divided society where the gap between rich and poor is still widening. In her introduction to *The Politics of Attachment* Patricia Hewitt writes:

The neo-liberal account of individuals – rational, self-interested, atomized – also turns out to be less than the whole story. The left has always had a different, more optimistic view of human nature, knowing people to be selfless as well as selfish, altruistic as well as self-interested. The rich tradition of developmental psychology and attachment theory – particularly well developed in this country since the 1950s – brings to an impoverished political debate the fundamental insight that we are, each of us, necessarily social beings, individuals created through relationships with others. The need for attachment, for an identity rooted in belonging, is about as far from 'no such thing as society' as it is possible to be.

(Kroemer and Roberts 1996)

However, the provisions of even the most forward-looking British politicians hardly match existing social welfare measures already in place in Scandinavian countries. The reorientation of the British state towards the model of a Scandinavian state could be supported, in part at least, on the basis of arguments from attachment theory and personal relations theory, but there is little evidence that this is on the government's agenda.

That there is still room, and the need, to make such changes is at least partially supported by recent studies. Anecdotally, Philip Pullman, whose 'Dark Materials' trilogy was joint winner of the third Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award in 2005, is quoted as contrasting the Swedish and UK governments, saying that the Swedish government 'genuinely stands up for children and the world of the child, and children's rights in every sense' (Edmarriam 2005). George Monbiot (2005), in a recent comparison of the performance of the Swedish and the British economies, quotes *The Economist* which refers to the UK as a 'pioneer of neoliberalism' and Sweden as 'one of the last outposts of distributionism'. He reports that by conventional measures of economic success like GDP per capita, current account balance and inflation, Sweden, pursuing policies designed to narrow the inequality of conditions between social classes, using measures described by *The Economist* as 'punitive taxes' and 'grandiose programs of public spending', appears to have ensured its 'economic competitiveness while ensuring that the poor obtain a higher proportion of national income'. In Sweden, according to the UN, the richest 10 per cent earn 6.2 times as much money as the poorest 10 per cent; in the UK that ratio is 13.8. However, it is in terms of human welfare that the quality of life in Sweden is most clearly superior to that in the UK. 'According to the quality of life measure published by *The Economist* ... Sweden ranks third in the world, the UK eleventh. Sweden has the world's third highest life expectancy, the UK the twenty-ninth. In Sweden there are 74 telephone lines and 62 computers per hundred people; in the UK just 59 and 41.' Monbiot reports that the UN's Human Development Report for 2004 shows that in Sweden 6.3 per cent of the population live below the

poverty line for developed nations (\$11 a day) whereas in the UK the figure is 15.7 per cent. In Sweden 7.5 per cent of the population are functionally illiterate, just over a third of the UK's figure of 21.8 per cent. He adds that in the UK, according to a separate study, you are three times as likely to stay in the economic class into which you were born than you are in Sweden. In another recent study by the Geneva-based World Economic Forum (Ward 2005) the UK ranks eighth in a global league table of countries measured according to the gender gap between women and men. 'In a study of 58 countries, assessing patterns of inequality in areas including economic status, political empowerment, health and education, Britain is pipped only by the four Scandinavian countries – with Sweden at the top of the chart – and by Iceland, New Zealand and Canada.' However, these figures are skewed by Margaret Thatcher's 11-year premiership and based primarily on the UK's success in educating girls to secondary and higher education levels. When it comes to economic opportunity, 'a measure based largely on access to the labour market through maternity rights and availability of government-provided childcare', the UK is 41st behind countries including India and Colombia. This is based upon 1998 figures so does not include recent improvements to Britain's maternity pay and leave. However, the UK 'comes 21st in the category of economic participation, measuring the proportion of women in the labour force and the gender pay gap, which is still 18 percentage points adrift in Britain 30 years after the Equal Pay Act'. Britain also only ranks 28th on the scale of female health and well-being, 'a category including teenage pregnancy as well as maternal and infant mortality rates and the effectiveness of government efforts to reduce inequality'. All of which is further support for the argument that there is considerable work to be done on transforming the UK social order if we are to produce the sort of object relationships appropriate for secure attachment.

Other general aspects of the social order that have been referred to by people using attachment research as their guide are the creation of community and changes to local democratic control, addressing poverty and the differences in material wealth, and securing a more caring and sensitive society with a transformed moral base. If a society was ordered to maximise secure attachment it would be both more secure and more certain and predictable than today's society, but is this the most important lesson that we can learn from attachment theory?

## OBJECT RELATIONS PSYCHOANALYSIS AS POLITICAL THEORY

In a recent paper, relevant to the whole thrust of this book, Gal Gerson (2004a) has identified the analysts and thinkers I have been proposing as the main representatives of personal relations theory, as members of a coherent

object relations theory, different from but related to Melanie Klein, whose underlying psychoanalytic theory can be usefully considered as a putative political theory. This group comprises Suttie and Fairbairn as well as Bowlby and Winnicott but does not include Macmurray, who is not an analyst. Gerson clearly differentiates this group as a whole from Klein on three counts, all of which will already be familiar. These are first, 'the primacy of sociability' – the fact that for these authors 'relationship is the person's structure', and that 'the quest for recognition . . . is constitutive of the self's structure'. Second, as has been stressed several times before, it is the child's real relationships with their real carers, without whom they could not survive, that determines the nature of inner reality. In general 'in both theory and treatment, this vision of psychoanalysis takes on a stronger social aspect, turning from the isolated patient to the environment' (774). The third difference Gerson identifies is 'The relation between integration and the environment' for which he uses Winnicott's model of the mother mirroring the infant. As has already been discussed, the whole process of the relationship between mother or primary carer and infant is the basis for the splitting of the pristine self and the development of the basic endopsychic structure in Fairbairn's theory. In the previous chapter I discussed how this relates to both Suttie and Winnicott by looking at the parallels between Fairbairn and Macmurray. Earlier in this chapter the process of splitting and the degree to which it was necessary was related to ways of handling the infant, amongst which would be mirroring. As we saw in Chapter 5 on creativity there are strong parallels between Winnicott's view of mirroring and the internal reality Fairbairn describes.

For a flavour of Gerson's complex argument I will quote from his abstract of the paper:

Object relations psychoanalysis . . . perceives dependence as the natural state of all humans . . . [and] . . . perceives humans in their original state as already grouped and driven by an urge to associate. Company (rather than private property or political participation) stands out as the basic right, and all the other rights follow on it as instruments for fulfilling it. The primacy of care lends itself to the justification of distributive measures meant to bolster family cohesion and individual confidence at the expense of the open market. The theory is therefore compatible with the premises of the social-democratic welfare state.

(769)

As we shall see, this last sentence is also regarded by Gerson as representing one of the theory's limitations, but first let us look at his argument, from the object relations theory shared by Bowlby, Suttie, Fairbairn and Winnicott to the political theory Gerson develops.

Gerson considers the state of nature theories of Locke, Hobbes and Rousseau in some detail in order to be able to show how this object relations

view differs from these. Gerson starts from the shared starting point of infantile dependence – 'the individual in the state of nature ... [is] ... primarily sociable rather than fearful or hungry' (777), 'in the state of nature there is no well-defined [social] individual yet' (777) – to argue that this differentiates the object relations view from other 'state of nature' political theories, in particular Hobbes and Rousseau.

Gerson goes on to consider the question of individual rights, and what rights might necessarily follow from the view that 'object relations psychoanalysis perceives humans as structured by the search for company as soon as they are born' (780). Here Gerson specifically argues for a difference between this object relations theory and that of Locke:

The psychoanalysts' state of nature is populated with infants who seek proximity to others rather than property or privacy. Biblical God plays no role here, but evolution does by driving infants to attach themselves to parents for their survival. Attachment is universal and belongs to the species survival. The *pattern* of attachment, on the other hand, is not a natural course that is identical in all cases. It is a specific process that moulds each individual into a unique personality. The formation of the adult personality belongs to society and history rather than to nature. (781)

Gerson argues that this approach reverses Locke's liberalism: 'In Locke's account, the individual is the starting point, political society forms through adults' decisions to enter the social contract, and politics is structured by rules set by this choice; in object relations, society is the premise and individuality its product' (781).

In his discussion of the development of separateness and agency from the relationship with the primary caregiver, Gerson uses Winnicottian disillusion, which was examined in relation to the parallels between Fairbairn and Macmurray in the previous chapter. Gerson argues that in the object relations theory he is discussing – what I have been referring to as personal relations theory – 'Attachment ... precedes other motivations such as material gain and explorative curiosity, sexuality and aesthetic pursuit ... to become fully human and capable of agency it is first necessary to be held by a specific other ... object relations starts with community and proceeds towards the distinct individual' (784); a view that I hope by now can be seen as totally consistent with the personal relations theory of Suttie, Fairbairn and Macmurray.

Gerson argues that when it comes to individual right, since the infant self is pristine, it is the environment within which the infant grows and develops that is crucial: 'the subject of right is the family environment that makes personal integration possible' (785). He goes on to argue that the object relations view of rights concerns 'what one has in common with others rather than what one holds back from others' (785), and that the fundamental right to relationship

is not exclusive 'but declares that individual's entitlement to engage with others' (785). At the same time the object relations theory views individual integration as the end of nurture and education and so cannot advocate the merging of the individual within society: 'Differentiation is for object relations a medium for maintaining community' (786). This is where the parallels with Macmurray are most obvious and where his views might usefully supplement the developed theory.

Basing his account on Suttie's work, Gerson (781) describes the process of the infant moving out from exclusive concern with mother to fuller participation in the wider world in terms that rehearse Suttie's view 'that play, co-operation, competition and culture-interests generally are a substitute for the mutually caressing relationship of the child and mother. *By these substitutes we put the whole social environment in the place once occupied by mother*' (Suttie 1960: 16). Using Fairbairn, Winnicott and Bowlby, Gerson goes on to look at the question of social reform, welfare, law enforcement and education. He quotes Fairbairn (1952a: 85), noting that health for object relations theory is a 'matter of object relations within the social order' (2004a: 787). He notes the object relations arguments, that breaks in care, separation from attachment figures, parental neglect or abuse, poverty, war, etc. all prevent the emergence of healthy autonomous people; that 'failure in the family afflicts society' (787), as he puts it, and that stability and cohesion of the political order presupposes integrated citizens: 'The political framework that object relations theory shores up operates to secure conditions for attachment. From the individual's perspective society is charged with safeguarding his or her right to be held and cared for. From society's perspective, its own good depends on the presence of benevolent, sociable and autonomous individuals' (788).

This process of producing benevolent, sociable, autonomous individuals operates through two distinct levels of activity: one within the family structure is satisfied by a specialised caring agent – the primary caregiver who is usually the biological mother and who, in part, guarantees the appropriate attachment and development; the other, which Gerson says is argued less often in the object relations literature, is the explicit argument for particular forms of social welfare:

Society is charged with fostering individuality, which can only emerge from a supporting environment. ... The fluctuating and complex modern economy does not constitute a caring environment; unless balanced by other institutions, it invades the home to make parents anxious and undermine their capacity to hold their children. The market therefore needs the welfare apparatus to produce the agents who are capable of playing in the market. This involves active defence of the family through social measures such as allowances and professional services. (788)

This echoes the conclusions of people familiar with attachment theory and the necessary consequences for the social order of taking attachment theory seriously (Marris 1996; Kroemer and Roberts 1996). It seems to me that it is not just a matter of defending families from the worst predations of an unbridled market economy but of changing the basis of the society towards more decentralised power structures into locally based, participatory and communal forms.

In his conclusion Gerson summarises the argument he has put forward based upon his interpretation of the object relations view he has identified:

Object relations perceives dependence as the fundamental condition all humans share. The sense of separation that classical liberalism ascribes to individuals is a product of early attention. In adulthood, separate individuality allows for communication with others through relation to the external world of material things, knowledge and culture. Accordingly, the right to relate and be cared for is the first right. Respect for separate individuality does not override the right to engage with others, but is instead an extension of that right. Politics focuses on maintaining the social unit where care is best given, a unit that the theory identifies with the family. Accordingly, the household is both supported by the broader society and exposed to its gaze through experts and officials. As the right to engage with others does not involve a notion of exclusive privacy in the way that Locke's concept of property does, there should be no objection to government's interest in the home. This active interest is meant, first, to protect the primary individual right, and second, to ensure that society's constituents would be autonomous agents capable of engagement with each other. No aspect of human life is seen as presocial, and no stage in life is seen as a break from the quest for community. Rather than being split into the private/natural and social/political spheres, the world as seen by object relations theory is concentric, extending from the infant's first cry to the broadest achievements and failures of civilization. A single set of principles pervades these expanding circles: Human individuality is driven and formed by relationships. Society and sociability are the premise, autonomous agency the end; it is the end, however, because in adult life individual autonomy is the means of healthy communication that is not aimed at dominating, ignoring, or incorporating others.

(790)

Despite recognising and acknowledging in a number of places within the paper that significant contributions to this object relations theory pre-date the development of the welfare state in Britain after the Second World War, one criticism of the theory put forward by Gerson is that it *comes out of and reflects* 'The type of family and gender differentiation and the level

of economic and social complexity the relatively consensual industrial society of the 1950s with its largely male workforce occupying steady jobs and entrusting many aspects of its life to government agencies and their scientific and social-scientific experts' (791). His warning is that anyone seeking to develop this theory 'should be aware of the extent to which the school's principles reflect the context in which they first appeared' (792).

Suttie's work was first published in the 1920s and 1930s, Fairbairn's mature theory was published initially during the Second World War, so it could be argued that rather than reflecting the development of the welfare state they were one of the many contributing factors towards its development. The later collection and publication of work by Suttie, Fairbairn, Bowlby and Macmurray in the 1950s can be seen as the further development of work completed before the welfare state was in existence and certainly before the 1950s as argued above. It may well be that this work was published because it was consistent with the development of the welfare state; but that would be a different argument.

There are two other main criticisms that Gerson develops, both of which depend upon his original argument. One relates to gender and family and the other to what he describes as an 'inability to perceive sharp disagreement as a normal social circumstance' (791). Regarding the second criticism, which Gerson expands upon as follows: 'Although it attempts to cut through assumptions of consensus back to a psychological core that precedes any context, object relations writes off hostility between social segments, competing value systems and alternative family structures as pathological symptoms' (791), I do not recognise Suttie, Fairbairn or Macmurray in this description. There is an existential aspect to both Fairbairn and Macmurray that sees the social order in which the infants find themselves as contingent. Suttie, who was fiercely critical of Freud and Adler for treating socially conditioned aspects of personality as if they were immutable instincts, argued that a patriarchal society would totally change the Oedipus situation since it would remove the need to give up mother and repress the tie to her that we all experience and value at some level. Fairbairn saw the Oedipus situation as a social situation that we constitute for ourselves based upon the prior development of the basic endopsychic structure, and influenced by our real experience of parents and others within the family. Macmurray was engaged in trying to think about and develop alternative communal forms of social organisation, and the logic of Fairbairn's concept of mature dependence is that even a liberal market-based economy, where attachment needs are protected, is a long way short of a society in which mature dependence would be the product: what Gerson calls 'benevolent, sociable and autonomous' individuals. If we consider attachment research and make a simplistic assumption that secure attachment is the same as mature dependence then we only have about 60 per cent securely attached people anyway.

The need for attachment, for care, is not dependent upon the form of the social order through which that care is provided. As has been argued, the provision of care during infancy is paramount but the exact type of family grouping is contingent. It may be that Bowlby and Winnicott were referring directly to the nuclear family they were experiencing in their daily life but that doesn't mean that their theory was restricted to that family form. The conditions for supporting infantile dependence and encouraging autonomy would remain constant across all social formations.

This takes us on to the objection to the theory on gender grounds. This follows from the assumption that this theory simply reflects the society of its supposed first appearance, something I have just argued against in relation to family form. Similarly I don't think there is anything in the need for some specialised mothering that requires women to revert to some old-fashioned, retrograde, subservient position if they want to be mothers. It depends upon the arrangements society makes to achieve its goal of specialised mothering. There are possibilities that the process of child bearing might be uncoupled from women and given to men or machines but this is for the most part science fiction and the reality is that, in general, the physical reproduction of the species is going to have to be carried out by women. But not women alone, or excluded, or underprivileged, as is sometimes the case today. One can easily imagine a society where the role of mother was a highly valued and responsible position that was economically rewarded. Less dramatically, the conditions surrounding birth and early care could be made considerably easier for everyone by allowing more maternity and paternity leave, better maternity pay, more flexibility in working hours, more work-based crèches, etc. One of Gerson's arguments which he expands upon in a paper criticising Winnicott (2004b) is that the 'specialist mother' is a second-class citizen because dependent upon another for economic support. This I think takes us into a consideration of Fairbairn's idea of mature dependence. Mature dependence as conceived by Fairbairn seems to me to have within it a radical concept of the social order in which equality, fraternity and reciprocity are of fundamental importance. This is what stops his view from simply reflecting 1950s Britain, as Gerson argues.

Mature dependence is Fairbairn's equivalent of the Freudian 'genital character'. But it is important to remind ourselves of the discussion in Chapter 3, that we are concerned primarily with self-enlargement here, to forms of social organisation consistent with the development of all of our powers to their fullest extent under our own direction. According to Fairbairn, mature dependence is characterised by the fact that all external objects are treated as differentiated others. There is an absence of the projection and introjection of internal objects. For Fairbairn this is an ideal and perhaps unattainable limit where the unconscious selves have disappeared, where everything can be thought about consciously and rationally. Here the internal object would be potentially conscious and represent a realistic reflection of outer reality: the

ideal object would have become a realistic object. Relations would be with real external objects. If infantile dependence is the state of nature from which a political theory might be developed out of personal relations theory then what is the function of mature dependence in Fairbairn's theory and how might it add to this model?

First of all it would be critical of the elision between benevolent, secure and autonomous agents and abstract economic individuals. We never escape dependence; we are social through and through, however much we delude ourselves that we are totally independent. So mature dependence, if translated into economic terms, would need to find ways of making the specialised mother economically equivalent to the other potentially maturely dependent agents within society. This in itself already points towards a form of society we are unfamiliar with. If we look at mature dependence as an ideal end of a process that starts with infantile dependence and passes through the transitional stages to a maturity that is no longer characterised by splitting, but by a spirit of giving and a recognition of others uncontaminated by projection and introjection, then we have an ideal where liberty, equality and fraternity are constitutive of relationships in general. This image is immediately and obviously critical of the divided societies we live in and points towards the path of development that personal relations theory describes. Secure attachments are a necessary and foundational aspect of mature dependency but are not sufficient to guarantee it. Achieving mature dependence by reducing splitting and promoting integration, within and amongst people, is a challenge to our imagination and resolve, and will not be possible without transforming the social order.