Horney & Humanistic Psychoanalysis

Conclusion

Most psychoanalytic theory has followed Freud in focusing on early origins as a means of explanation and therapy. Well in advance of many recent critics of psychoanalysis, Karen Horney felt that this practice results in circular reasoning, in the conversion of analogies into causes, and in a variety of other epistemological problems. She also felt it to be therapeutically ineffective. Horney doubted that early childhood could ever be accurately recovered, since we are bound to reconstruct it from the perspective of our present needs, beliefs, and defenses. We have a natural desire to explain things in terms of their origins, but Horney felt that there are as many myths of origin as there are psychoanalytic theories. It is more profitable, she argued, "to focus on the forces which actually drive and inhibit a person; there is a reasonable chance of understanding these, even without much knowledge of childhood" (Horney, 1939, p. 146). Horney tried to explain behavior in terms of its function within the current constellation of defenses and to account for contradictory attitudes, actions, and beliefs by seeing them as part of a structure of inner conflicts.

Karen Horney is perhaps the first humanistic psychoanalyst. Her theories are entirely compatible with those of Abraham Maslow, who was influenced by her. Both theories are based on the idea of a "real self" that it is the object of life to actualize. Horney focused on what happens when we become alienated from our real selves as a result of a pathogenic environment, while Maslow focused on what we require for healthy growth and the characteristics of self-actualizing people. Horney describes the defensive strategies we employ when our healthy basic needs for safety, love and belonging, and esteem have been turned into insatiable neurotic needs as a result of having been thwarted. The theories of Horney and Maslow are complementary and taken together provide a more comprehensive picture of human behavior than either provides by itself.

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http://plaza.ufl.edu/bjparis/horney/fadiman/08_conclusion.html

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