

GENERAL BOOKBINDING CO.

75 34088 2 013 1 S

QUALITY CONTROL MARK

4086

PSYCHOLOGICAL ALIENATION: ISOLATION AND SELF-ESTRANGEMENT*

Frank Johnson

The term *alienation* is currently used to describe objectively observable states of separateness occurring in human groups. An older usage viewed alienation as a subjective, individual condition. Until early in this century the term was used within psychiatry as a loose generic category describing various states of pathological isolation and madness. In this essay alienation will be reviewed in these latter connections as it contributes to the understanding of certain clinical states of disturbance. Some factors which make the experience of introspection threatening will be reviewed. Clinical conditions will be discussed in which a malignant self-absorption is conspicuous—notably the schizoid personality. Some of the formulations and explanations of these conditions will also be included. Even in the title of this article, the unfortunate although conventional dichotomy between subjective self and objective social reality is perpetuated. Distinctions concerning “inside-outside,” “subjective-objective,” and “psychological-social,” are only phenomenological, but these pseudo-polarities will be used here because they are central to the alienated person’s explanation of himself as an object in the social universe. The immense problems posed by the use of these polarities as ontological realities are beyond the scope of this presentation. Fairbairn’s conception of an “object-relations” personality partly cuts through this dilemma.¹¹

* Reprinted from *Alienation: Concept, Term, and Meanings*, edited by Frank Johnson (New York: Seminar Press, 1973). Some of this material was first delivered in 1970 at the Institute on Alienation, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University.

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, taxonomy has been the *bête noire* of psychiatry. A good deal of criticism has been leveled at the categorizing and labeling activities of psychiatrists. The criticism of classification per se seems unwarranted when based on the solipsism holding that all persons are ineffably unique and hence incapable of being categorized. Criticism is genuinely warranted, however, when it is based on the understanding that behavioral classification is monstrously complicated and inconsistent. The need to explain and codify behavior for the purpose of scientific classification is, of course, merely an institutionalized version of the universal propensity to make human behavior more intelligible and predictable. Many institutions, such as law, government, and religion, which are concerned with classification, are able to limit their concern to behavior that is specific to their institution. To justify their classifications, they generally employ unitary systems of explanation for such categories. Classification within psychiatry, on the other hand, is much more comprehensive in its concern with the behavior of human beings at all stages of the life cycle, in all conceivable situations, and in radically different cultures and societies. At the same time, classification in psychiatry is stricken with major conceptual discontinuities inherent in the logically disconnected systems (genetic, biochemical, anatomical, psychological, cultural, social) employed in classifying.

The classifications described in this essay are confined to conditions of exceptional self-alienation currently subsumed into the diagnosis of schizoid personality. No serious student of human behavior believes in the "reality" of psychiatric classifications, except as nominal categories. Since the quality of separateness is central to the phenomenology of schizoid states, a dichotomized and isolated caricature of existence is especially difficult to avoid. The artificially limited nature of closed-system, psychological classifications should be borne in mind by the reader as this essay unfolds.

Schizoid Symptoms

We are, however, not only speaking about a specific syndrome, but discussing a number of conditions in which individuals manifest their suffering in terms of their consciousness of estrangement and idiosyncrasy. The usual symptoms of these states, adapted from Robert Daly, are as follows:

1. A tendency to experience exorbitant anxiety in relatively ordinary interactions with other people.
2. A tendency toward absorption with ideas and fantasy.
3. An uncertainty in thinking and acting (ambivalence plus hesitation in performance).
4. A gnawing consciousness of a lack of "fit" with other individuals or groups.
5. A tendency to withdraw from others.
6. An alternating vacillation toward and away from social contact.⁶

In these instances, withdrawal is not used selectively as a maneuver called up as a response to specific threatening conditions but, rather, is a response to any situation sensed to be even vaguely dangerous or noxious. The purpose of retreat is to reduce external contact with people, thereby reducing conflict, and, just possibly, experiencing less anxiety. While such a strategy may, in fact, reduce the immediately threatening experience of anxiety, it often engenders anxiety around the withdrawal itself. Furthermore, having fled from the disharmony and contention of external contacts, the individual often rediscovers this same disharmony and conflict in himself.

This tendency toward overly ideational activity in self-alienation does not imply anything about the qualitative nature of the ideation. Depending upon the person's aptitude and previous experience, he may ponder either significant or trivial ideas. The problem is that the mental life, whatever its quality, is overactive.

A distinctive characteristic of the withdrawal in self-alienation is that after having withdrawn, alienated individuals do not stay unobtrusively by themselves. They engage in vacillating moves toward and away from people. As described by Daly, the schizoid individual does not find a comfortable hermitage but is beset with approach-avoidance conflicts around affiliation with others.

*The Phenomenology and Significance of Introspection**

Introspection, of course, refers to mental experiences where the individual is both the subject and object of his own conscious aware-

* The following remarks on introspection are intended to be descriptive. The philosophical and psychological literature on introspection is vast and cannot be reviewed here. The reader is referred to Kohut.²³

ness. Introspection stands in distinction to fantasy, reverie, or day-dreaming insofar as these latter modes are not accomplished by an intense, conscious focus on self-observation. Introspection also stands in contrast to problem-solving, logicizing, or formulating, where the content of thought is concerned with the abstraction of phenomena which are conceptually identified as outside of the individual.

The term *introspection* often suggests deliberations on important choices of action. However, the implication that introspection is usually auspicious is misleading. Most self-reflection is concerned with fleeting deliberations on the personal consequences of options in ordinary, prosaic interaction.

It is difficult to make judgments about the quality and frequency of introspection in other persons. Self-reflection is an intensely private experience that is only exceptionally communicated to others and even then is usually reported retrospectively rather than at the time it comes up. Only a few situations—for example, psychoanalytic treatment and some creative writing—are institutionalized, albeit artificial, versions of public introspection.

The capacity for introspection and the frequency with which people introspect varies widely. Most individuals, when they think of it at all, speculate about the introspection of others in terms of the characteristics of their own self-reflection.

Systematic attempts to survey the variations in life styles of normal populations, including the frequency and nature of introspection, have not been made. Universal behavioral classifications, designated as nosologies of either “character” or “personality,” do take into account certain subjective, cognitive, and emotional experiences of the individuals being classified. In psychiatry, however, the most popular classifications of personality are ultimately based more on the characteristics of social interaction, such as sociopathic personality and passive-aggressive personality.

Furthermore, classifications such as the character disorders, neuroses, and psychoses depict abnormality. The “normal” qualities of subjective life, such as cognition and memory, are tautologically suggested to be the absence of “abnormal mental content.” Some classifications of character deriving from psychoanalytic theory may be related more closely to the subjective rather than interactional aspects of the individual’s life.^{12,28} But although these classifications are more closely based on subjective life, they are, again, concerned

with abnormality and are based on *a priori* schemes of personality maturation which are idealized and culture-bound. They do not attempt to examine the normal distribution of varying cognitive styles, except by way of speculation, case study, and anecdote. Finally, existential psychiatrists and phenomenologists who are currently devoted to the phenomenology of subjective mental experience tend toward relativistic interpretations of meaning and hence show little interest in categorization.

In summary, the systems of personality classification that are most popular offer designations based primarily on social interactional aspects of behavior, primarily with reference to "abnormal" individuals. There is little empirically based research on the occurrence of introspection in ordinary life. For these reasons, introspection remains poorly defined and is usually regarded as either socially irrelevant or narcissistic and socially dangerous.

THE SOCIAL UNACCEPTABILITY OF SCHIZOID SYMPTOMS

The Mirage of "Sameness"

The capacity to understand the subjectivity of others is limited by the tendency of individuals to project their own mental operations onto others. This is parallel to the tendencies of cultural groups to project their own ethnocentric attitudes onto the behavior of other groups, frequently at the cost of serious misunderstanding. While individuals may intellectually understand that there is considerable variation in the mental activities of others, they show a great deal of naïvety about the nature of this variation. Most individuals cannot either tolerate or assimilate evidence of mental activity in others that differs very much from their own thoughts and formulations. Awareness of the broad range of the variations in the thoughts and actions of individuals is further minimized by most people through their narrow choice of friends, marital partner, church, neighborhood, job, clubs, and other organizations.

The narrow range of their affiliations encourages conformity and conventionality, thus reassuring individuals that they do think alike (i.e., they appear to endorse the same normative explanations and prescriptions). This means that, in general, people agree to certain explanations for human behavior and, at least in public,

tend to act in similar ways. The fact that the purposes and meanings inherent in such similar actions may be highly idiosyncratic is usually not noticed except in conflicts which develop in intimate relationships between spouses, parents, children, close associates, and friends. This mirage of "sameness" thus becomes seriously challenged only in dyadic relationships where the vagaries of subjective experience are either strongly inferred or directly communicated between individuals. Such interpersonal difficulties may force them to become conscious of the differences in their mental functioning.

The investigation of one's own purposes through deliberate introspection regrettably, therefore, becomes associated with negativity as a symptom of disturbance. The creative and conflict-free uses of introspection are less noticeable and more readily forgotten. Unusual self-concerns, obsessions, or ambivalence, especially those which can be seen publicly, are therefore interpreted as threatening, insofar as they disturb the myth of sameness and communality, and idiosyncratic, through advertising that something is peculiar about the individual who has fallen into such self-absorption. Individuals who tend to be unusually dreamy or self-reflective are in danger of finding themselves defined as eccentric or abnormal.

The Need for Conventional Explanation

Looked at somewhat differently, conspicuous introspection defies the strong preference for the use of conventional, superficial explanations of human behavior in ordinary social situations. From the standpoint of economy of explanation, most behavior is regarded as self-explanatory; for example, (1) "John went to the drug store to buy razor blades," or is explained satisfactorily on conventional grounds; for example, (2) "John is working very hard at his job in order to win a promotion." Such parsimonious explanations, however adequate and facile in ordinary situations, place an onus on explanations involving more profound interpretations of behavior; for example, (3) "Is John buying razor blades because he is suicidal?" or (4) "Is John overworking as a way of competing with his father?"

Introspection—not day-dreaming—is often an attempt to infer or discover more profound and, hence, less conventional meanings for human action. Such pondering may be seen as dangerous, since deeper motivational explanations are often used to control others'

behavior by making them feel guilty for it; for example, (5) "John spends too much time on his appearance," or (6) "John's work keeps him away from his family."

Conventional explanations are satisfying partly because they relieve the explainer of imputing anything but the most innocuous of meanings to John's buying razor blades or working hard. Meanings which inquire into less overt motivations suggest that John's mental machinations may not be what they should be.

The final examples (5) and (6) imply that John's behavior is unconventional but at the same time deny and suppress this by criticizing the effects of his actions. The point is that four of these statements, (1), (2), (5), and (6), have very little to do with the person, John, but rather reflect the need for the explainer to reassure himself about the uniformity of thought and behavior. Statements (3) and (4) are most threatening, since they acknowledge something of the hidden introspective inner life of both John and the explainer.

Fears of Internal Disorganization

Another impediment to the understanding of introspection and schizoid conditions stems from the possibility that self-reflection will give rise to an awareness of conflict. Especially at times of crisis, introspection can lead to the experiencing of threatening or dangerous thoughts. Adults who deal with critical events in their lives (loss of family members, change in work role, immersion in another culture) may find the introspection forced on them by such catastrophic events to be a confirmation of their own sense of peculiarity. This can simplistically be based on the assumption that the mere existence of such diffuse thoughts, feelings, and fantasies pronounces them deviant, strange, or even mad, insofar as it differs from what other people are thinking.

It is difficult to introspect very deeply without finding inconsistencies in one's recollections, thoughts, and feelings. Since most people try to act consistently to themselves and others, their discovery of inconsistencies can be confusing and painful. Their awareness of contrasting feelings may occasion in them pronounced anxiety, and, therefore, interfere with their spontaneous interaction. Many individuals find introspection threatening since they cannot easily assimilate these discrepancies in feelings, thoughts, and meanings

about which they have hoped to have simple, unified convictions. By implication, they tend to see hesitancy or unusual self-reflection in others as dangerous, idiosyncratic, and strange.

The Priority of External Reality

Despite some trends in the current counterculture and the post-war interest in existentialism and Eastern mysticism, the message in Western cultures seems oppressively obvious: "reality" resides outside of the individual. The accepted orientation is to relate to the world in a direct and discrete way as an external environment. States of cogitation which center on internal phenomena run the risk of being disparaged as irrational and dangerous. As described previously, man's consciousness and existence are viewed as corpuscular with an emphasis on his discrete nature, his ultimate separation from other beings and things.²⁰ The external world (including, of course, overt interaction) are objective, regular, and predictable. Subjectivity is seen as the antithesis of this: normless, irrational, and bizarre. Except for unusually compelling religious or aesthetic motives, a focus on internal phenomena is socially repugnant. Unusual self-preoccupation, trances, or reveries which lack social purpose or consensual meaning are regarded as amusing at best but more commonly as plainly hazardous. One of the hazards, of course, is that the dreamer, the poet, or the contemplative may not find his way back to "reality" again.

Some Exceptions in the Acceptability of Schizoid Symptoms

It is useful to divide those situations which place existential stresses on individuals into two categories: those occurring in conjunction with a natural progression through the life cycle, and those which are adventitious, historical, or accidental. In this division, maturational stresses would be those which develop in association with crises encountered at nodal points during normal development and involution. Adventitious situations would be those which are more fortuitously encountered by the individual; they would include natural catastrophies, the unexpected loss of intimate associates, and exposure to severe physical threat. Given the vagaries of life experience, the possibilities of temporary severe isolation due to accident, mischance, and fate are unlimited.

Both maturational and adventitious crises often present the individual with a sudden and compelling need to change. The regular ongoing activity of the individual is challenged and found temporarily inadequate. In these situations, maturational and accidental stresses demand a new adaptation. As mentioned before, the use of introspection as a way of problem-solving or handling existential anxiety is obviously distributed quite irregularly. Specific crises of maturational stages in no way elicit uniform deliberations or reactions from individuals undergoing stresses.

Adolescence, however, is partly an exception to this, at least insofar as the radical changes in physical and social functioning which take place force all individuals into states of self-reflection. Adolescents do not vault directly from their childhood into secure adult adaptations. Rather, they almost constantly modify their thought and action according to standards established for this troubled period. They are involved in what at the time appears to be an endless revision of their relationships with parents, teachers, friends, and associates. Uncertainties and conflicts developing from these ever-changing relationships thrust the adolescent into self-reflection.

There are several differences between the introspection natural to adolescents and the potentially more pathological degree of self-awareness confronting individuals at later decades of life by more adventitious circumstances. First, adolescents are expected to be in a process of change and, at least partly, to do this as a group. They are not only expected to change but find comfort and direct support from their similarly awkward peers. This is not true, of course, in later adult life when protracted states of shyness, eccentricity, withdrawal, or impulsivity connote graver meaning—usually some form of abnormality.

SELF-ALIENATION: SCHIZOID CONDITIONS

The foregoing sections in this essay have furnished a background to a description of states of self-alienation. It should be added that social and institutional factors influencing the classification of normal and abnormal behavior obviously affect the ways these conditions are viewed. Alienation is defined somewhat differently in different eras, depending on the ideologies and classificatory systems prevalent at the time. The forms of self-alienation have been described as a set of possible deficiencies in existence, cognition, conation, feeling,

recalling, and behavior. Other schemes for defining self-alienation have been discussed elsewhere and will not be repeated here.^{20a} This section will describe the experience of self-alienation through an examination of its phenomenology and genesis.

In conceiving any broad, descriptive psychiatric generalizations about clinical conditions, one must make the difficult choice between conceptual simplicity and more complex and paradoxical generalizations which are closer to reality. It is very tempting to describe ideal states and conditions which are neatly differentiated from other conditions. Although such "states" are caricatures, they are, in their very simplicity, easier to conceptualize. They also suggest that the dichotomy between abnormality and normality is reassuringly distinct. Regrettably, behavior is far more complex than classifications, dichotomies, and simplifications would suggest. Some reductionism, however, is necessary in order to make description coherent.

In this section only two versions of self-alienation will be presented. First are alienated states defined as the manifest schizoid personality, where there is a high degree of consciousness of estrangement from self and others accompanied by copious anxiety and withdrawal. This first species of self-alienation appears in severe states of separation accompanied by eccentricity, peculiarity, and the experience of symptoms which, at times, are disabling.

The second species of self-alienation are those latent schizoid states where such separations are present but are not evident or manifest in the person's social performance. These latter individuals do not experience high degrees of anxiety or public idiosyncrasy. Individuals with these latent conditions are more often described in the sociological and fictional literature, rather than in psychiatric writings, since their intact social functioning would suggest that they are "well."*

A Historical Background of Schizoid Conditions

The concept of schizoid derives from Bleuler's original and brilliant conceptualization of schizophrenia published in 1911.¹ It is popularly misunderstood that Bleuler used the Greek root *oX'S* to

* The author regards the adjectives *manifest* and *latent* as unsatisfactory but includes them here since they are commonly used within psychiatry to dichotomize medical and behavioral syndromes. The adjectives *pattern* and *trait* are similarly unsatisfactory but are included because they are in conventional use.

define a "splitting of personality" observable in a number of severe psychoses previously labeled "dementia praecox" by Emil Kraepelin. Bleuler's use of the concept of splitting in these disorders was more complex than this, however. He meant to indicate a schism or splitting of psychological functions which he held to be distinctive and common to several different conditions. These conditions included not only the then established varieties of dementia praecox, but also less severe, and even nonpsychotic states in which the features of intense self-concern, exaggerated shyness, and some splitting of personality functions were prominent.

The basic etymological denotations of the words *alienation* and *schizoid* both refer to separation and tension. The word *schizoid*, however, is confined to the notion of cleavage of previously integral entities, while *alienation* suggests an increasing distance between two entities that were not necessarily integrally connected or fused before.

One of these basic cleavages described by Bleuler was the mental disconnection between the self and the outside, which he defined as "autism." He described a variety of splitting or dissociation between thought and action and held that a severe tendency for stark dissociation was a primary symptom in a number of psychotic and nonpsychotic conditions which he labeled *schizophrenia*.

Currently the word *schizoid* (as both noun and adjective) is used in a number of ways. *Schizoid*, like *schizophrenia*, enjoys a non-technical meaning denoting a quality of strangeness, isolation, or peculiarity.*³¹ In psychiatry and psychoanalysis, *schizoid* has at least three technical meanings. First, it is used to refer to an early developmental period when the infant begins to make rudimentary distinctions about the disconnectedness or separation between himself and his human and nonhuman environment. The second meaning of *schizoid*, derived from the first, is a topographical depiction of human personality described by Fairbairn and later clarified by Guntrip.† Basing their insights on the work of Freud, Melanie Klein, and their own clinical observations, they conceptualize human personality as a series of epigenetic stages which are graphically viewed as concentric but separate levels of functioning (to be described in

* The definitions of *schizoid* which follow are taken from a number of psychiatric texts and dictionaries (Lorand, Hinsie, and Campbell).

† A number of comments in this article are taken from the works of Fairbairn¹¹ and Guntrip.^{14,15}

somewhat more detail later). They envision the most central, that is, ontogenetically earliest, ego experiences as constituting a schizoid "core" or "position."

The third meaning of *schizoid* describes specific characterological clinical syndromes incorporating features of excessive isolation and withdrawal. In the latter nosological usage, there are two major variations. The first of these is "schizoid personality pattern," in which all the major attributes associated with the syndrome are present. The second variation is "schizoid personality trait," where schizoid characteristics accompany other personality configurations and adaptations—including, obviously, "normality."

In the current *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* published by the American Psychiatric Association, schizoid personality is defined as follows:

This behavior pattern manifests shyness, or sensitivity, seclusiveness, avoidance of closer competitive relationships, and also eccentricity. Autistic thinking without loss of capacity to recognize reality is common, as is daydreaming and the inability to express hostility and ordinary aggressive feelings. These patients react to disturbing experiences and conflicts with apparent detachment.⁸

There is a confusion, however, in the usage of the diagnosis "schizoid personality." Consistent with Bleuler's original view, some psychiatrists currently regard "schizoid personality" as either a precursor or a latent variant of schizophrenia. In a corollary way, it is also considered to be a residual characterological analogue of schizophrenia that is present, for example, following recovery from an acute breakdown. The terms "schizoid" or "schizoid personality" also are used to depict a borderline condition, again in the sense of an incipient psychosis or following recovery from serious psychological disturbance. (Borderline states within psychiatry are, in themselves, a complicated subject and no attempt will be made here to relate schizoid personality to various other borderline conditions that have been described by Grinker, Schmideberg, Hoch and Polatin, or others.)

It should be said, however, that psychiatrists taken as a group tend to read dire significance into the designation of schizoid personality—a significance which is by no means commonly substanti-

ated. Clinicians whose therapeutic work centers on the treatment of adolescent or college populations generally attach less portent to schizoid phenomena; they are seen as relatively innocuous elements in their patients. This is also true of clinicians who work with adults in concentrated psychoanalytic work. There the discovery of latent schizoid themes can be found routinely in individuals whose social functioning would in no way suggest (or might even belie) the existence of such "splitting."

The relationship between schizoid states and schizophrenia cannot be comprehensively presented here, partly because the arguments for seeing these as separate conditions versus points on a continuum are diverse and inconclusive. In a review of the genetic aspects of schizophrenia, Böök² discounts the schizoid-schizophrenia continuum hypothesis on the grounds that schizoid trait pattern disturbance is so inclusive that the retrospective establishment of schizoid precursors following psychosis is an inexact way of determining the precondition. Furthermore, he cites prospective studies where close examination of personality characteristics prior to the clinical onset of schizophrenia demonstrated no positive correlation between severe introversion, apathy, or withdrawal and later schizophrenic breakdown.

Paradoxically, the hypothesis of a schizoid-schizophrenic continuum, held for different reasons by many biologically oriented professions, has been revived and given weight by scientists and writers of fiction concerned with the contemporary experiences of alienation. These writings suggest that disintegration into schizophrenia is a direct function of social and familial pressures. Those who take this position are from various scientific and literary backgrounds, and it is not possible to summarize their points of view here. In a sense, however, they all use a somewhat simplified, symbolic interactional model of "illness." They portray schizoid states and schizophrenia as simple resultants of noxious social pressures. Their basic contention is that internalized, individual madness is caused directly by familial, corporate, and national madness.

Contemporary Interpretations and Formulations of Schizoid Conditions

Classical Freudian psychology presents a description of human personality based on a set of biological drives inherent in all indi-

viduals.* These are observable through life but are most blatantly evident during infancy and childhood. Such infantile drives are depicted as compelling motivational forces within the personality, which largely account for the direction of behavior throughout the life of the individual. The development of conceptualizations of the more conscious, adaptive, and executive aspects of adult human personality occurred later in Freud's career and was fostered by a second generation of psychoanalytic authors (Anna Freud, Wilhelm Reich, Heinz Hartmann, etc.). With orthodox psychoanalysis, therefore, ego psychology came as a later historical adumbration whose current status within psychoanalysis is still dogged by the earlier formulations of unconscious processes, infantile behavior, and biological drives.

With a minimum of clamor a British psychoanalyst, Fairbairn, and his interpreter, Guntrip, have quietly attempted to establish the ego as the most significant element in human personality.† Topographically and dynamically, they picture the ego, rather than the id, at the center of the personality. Briefly stated, Fairbairn disagrees with Freud that libido is a biological impulse, an autonomous instinct energized primarily to reduce tension or to achieve pleasure. Fairbairn sees libido as basically *object-seeking*, rather than tension-reducing, even in earliest life. He pictures primitive prohibitory superego functions as precursors of later conscious ego attitudes that are concerned with the defense of the organism against its own object-seeking mechanisms, as well as in terms of conflicts of individuals with their external world. Moreover, he visualizes early infantile primary ego states as core experiences of a schizoid type in which the infant begins to define himself as separate from objects. In this scheme *objects* are defined both as persons and as other material objects in the environment.

In the broadest terms, Fairbairn visualizes human personality as basically an object-relations personality. This is opposed to those who formulate object relations as secondary or even incidental. Fairbairn speculates that at the earliest periods of human life, the rudimentary ego is primarily concerned with the building of internal

* A particularly succinct description of the classical Freudian position is contained in Fenichel.^{12a}

† Guntrip's critique of Freudian theory is done with great care. He quotes the original Freudian sources extensively and also includes responses to criticisms of Fairbairn's theory by other psychoanalytic authors.^{13,10}

representations (internal objects) based upon relationships with the outside world (external objects). Since the external world is exceedingly complex to the child, the internal representations of these phenomena are correspondingly complicated, even in precognitive childhood.

The concept of the schizoid splitting of these internal representations follows diverse courses. To a certain extent, there is a separation or splitting which is basic to the very process of making internal representations of external phenomena. This kind of separation would be similar to the objectification or awareness of others incorporated in one of the meanings of alienation.^{20b}

According to a second, and more pathological, meaning, splitting is a process whereby internal representations of the outside world are fractionated or split as a reaction to extremely threatening experiences with external objects. Typically, such pathological splitting is a way of dealing with negative, frightening, and baleful aspects of objects encountered in the environment. Paradigmatically, this occurs in internalizing the harsh, frightening, and unpleasant aspects of the mother, which are split and separated from the benign, supportive impressions of the same mother. The goal of this splitting is to allow the infant or child to continue relating in a positive way with his otherwise frightening mother. Splitting of this kind, if done in a wholesale way, is held to account for the presence of an abundance of dissociated, negative, internal "partial objects." These partial objects may later become identified with phenomena other than those in which they are originally encountered. (One might note that this formulation amounts to an altered version of the mechanisms and function of "repression.")

A quantitative factor must be added here to clarify Fairbairn's concept of schizoid personality. If the infant or child has a surfeit of unpleasant encounters with threatening external objects, he must necessarily engage in a great deal of pathological splitting. It is as if many objects in the environment must be selectively processed and divested of their threatening quality in order for the individual to survive and continue interacting. Phenomenologically, the onus of this excessive use of selective decontamination is twofold. First, the individual—simply because of the frequency with which he must perform these functions—becomes acutely aware of himself as a processor of threatening external phenomena. Second, those negative

internalizations which are fractionated from the original external objects accumulate as a frightening series of disconnected noxious feelings, memories, and experiences. Since these are disorganized, through being split from their original objects and contexts, they later become diffusely identified with the self. As such, they constitute a vaguely substantiated but extremely powerful reservoir of negative feelings about the self.

This abbreviated review of Fairbairn's position is presented not only as general background, but for the elucidation it offers of the genesis of schizoid conditions. The most important aspects of his theory, for our present purposes, is that it accounts for the prodigious amount of negativity and anxiety present in severely schizoid individuals.

Self-Alienation as Described
by Laing, Fromm, and Horney

Three other theorists have contributed to the description and formulation of states of pathological estrangement: Erich Fromm,³¹ Karen Horney,¹⁸ and R. D. Laing.^{24,25} Interestingly, all three have had at least as much impact on readers outside of their particular professional audience as they have had within their own disciplines. Each has spoken of the relationship between psychological and social phenomena. Also, the concept of alienation has been central in all of their writings, although each of them has used alienation in a relatively general way.

Schacht²⁹ has analyzed Fromm's and Horney's use of the concept. In his able and complicated analysis of their major writings, he acknowledges the importance of their contributions but finds their use of the concept of alienation loose and its application to diverse human conditions uncritical. The vagueness, ambiguity, and shifting polarity of the term *alienation* has been reviewed elsewhere.^{20c} Fromm and Horney, like many others, have suffered from the outrageously flexible etymology of the word. Their contribution to the popularization of alienation as an experience in contemporary life is immense. Some apparent contradictions in their use of the concept are partly attributable to the overly rich denotations inherent in its various meanings.

In the same spirit, the writings of R. D. Laing on the ubiquitous propensity for experiencing alienation have had an extraordinary impact on professional and public audiences. In addition to his

lucid descriptions of schizophrenic patients, Laing has added to the understanding of schizoid conditions through his analyses of the individual's experience of estrangement, particularly in *The Divided Self*.

Each of these authors formulates that individual deviations and madness are directly related to the impact of a malevolent society on the individual. Of course, the implication of social factors in individual deviance and madness in no way is exclusive to these authors, as they readily point out. What is distinctive is the importance given to social factors as sufficient explanations of abnormality. Horney does this least. Fromm certainly makes this point of view plain, but his focus diffuses over into an indictment of society for its social, economic, and humanitarian shortcomings, rather than delving into a protracted case study of alienated man.

Laing comes down on society much harder and concludes that the whole question of abnormality is simply social. In a way that appears almost playful (although it is not) he exonerates the psychotic as normal and sees conformity and adaptation as truly psychotic.

In a recent review, the theoretical implications of Laing's work have been critically examined by Siegler, Osmond, and Mann.^{23,30} Although these critics seem overly perturbed with Laing for being both nonmedical in his orientation and seductive in his writing, their analysis is interesting. They submit selections of his writings to three of their own analytic models of schizophrenia ("conspiratorial," "psychoanalytic," and "psychedelic"). These models are used by them to inspect a variety of theories of schizophrenia. Their brief against Laing is complicated and cannot readily be summarized. However, they show Laing as interpreting schizophrenia largely on the basis of conspiratorial and psychedelic hypotheses. Formulations of psychoanalytic explanations are far less consistent.*

* Comparison of his work by four of these critics' additional models of schizophrenia ("medical," "moral," "family interactional," and "social") are not made, presumably because the authors do not feel his theories adapt to them. They do not rigorously show this, however. They do dispute the "family interactional" aspects of Laing's theories because they feel he sees family members as "schizophrenogenic" rather than seeing madness as a collective interaction, as put forth by Haley, Jackson, Bateson, and others. Presumably, they dismiss the "social" model on the same basis. My understanding of "conspiratorial" is that it is not necessarily "paranoid" or pathological. Conspiracies, after all, do exist. Conspiratorial hypotheses do, however, tend to suggest unilaterally caused conditions and often are oversimplified.

Even allowing for the venom of his critics, Laing's work seems heavy on both the conspiratorial and psychedelic explanations of madness. He sees schizoid states and schizophrenia as externally manufactured conditions. The patient is a passive object who is constricted and defeated by his family and society, who label him "sick" and submit him to a series of degradations, incarcerations, and pressures to conform to the ubiquitous "madness" of everyday life.

Laing's psychedelic explanation of schizoid states and schizophrenia promotes the transcendental and creative features of madness. In his view certain psychotic states are transitions to higher states of functioning. Psychosis is therefore a "healing or renewal in reaction to the confines of a stultifying "normality." This psychedelic emphasis directly suggests that estrangement, dissociation, and hallucination are positive, even beautiful, experiences.*

THE ONTOLOGICAL STRUGGLE AND THE PROBLEM OF NEGATIVITY

Currently there are numerous contributions to social-interactional conceptions of schizoid states. One might divide such writings into three main areas: (1) writings on the general oppressive social and cultural factors that account for some states of self-alienation and deviance; (2) writings on certain social actions of labeling, suppressing, and controlling that have to do with the designation of madness and deviance; and (3) writings which describe the conditions of severe estrangement as seen by the estranged.

Much of Johnson's *Alienation: Concept, Term, and Meanings*²⁰ is concerned with the first of these, although by no means solely with "psychiatric conditions." The activities associated with labeling have been described but are not a major focus here. This section is concerned with writings, notably those of Laing, Fromm, Fairbairn, and Guntrip, which describe and "explain" malignant forms of estrangement as reactions to social forces.

R. D. Laing is currently the most influential writer on ontological concerns in self-alienated, schizoid individuals. The centrality of problems of being should not suggest that these are the only mechanisms operating in these conditions. However, many clinical phe-

* The creative aspects of schizophrenic disintegration have been commented on by a number of authors in addition to Laing. A relatively recent exposition of this is available by Dabrowski.⁵

nomena are related to the problems of individual existence or "being," and hence are appropriately emphasized as ontic.

On the other hand, fatalism and negativity,* which are often connected with these ontological concerns, have appeared less frequently in existential writings on malignant states of estrangement. Likewise they are seldom treated in sociological writings. Much literature concerning alienated man implies that such alienation is inevitable, even desirable. Negativity is usually accounted for by way of projection or externalization. It has become popular to consider individual madness solely a product of malignant families or societies. The fact that schizoid individuals themselves actively expand and deepen their own negativity and unrelatedness seems to escape examination.

Flight from persons or from the "social reality" is generally rationalized as being necessarily due to the malignancy of society. Part of the failure to account for the individual's complicity in this process may be attributable to the lack of a rigorous theoretical developmental foundation for examining the genesis of these conditions. It may also result from using the subjective, descriptive existential utterances of individual patients as exclusive explanations of states of estrangement. Objectification, or critical formulation based on other criteria (interpersonal, transactional, etc.), is dispensed with, possibly through being considered to be yet more evidence of socially opprobrious actions against the individual.

*The Function and Meaning of Inauthenticity
in Schizoid Conditions*

As mentioned before, ontological concerns are central to the experience of self-alienation. The individual is awed by his realization of the synthetic nature of his own, and presumably others', existence. He is distracted by the sound of his own internal machinery, which diminishes his capacity to know or feel others. He is so con-

* *Negativity* in this essay is used in a relativistic and conventional sense rather than in an ethical, empirical, or statistical sense. Judgments concerning negativity are made according to the tendency to move toward the conventionally regarded lower, or lesser, pole in choices between opposite positions within a given category, for example, good-bad, optimism-pessimism, more-less, happy-unhappy, and beautiful-ugly. We are concerned with the *style* of choosing the conventionally negative pole, rather than with lending any support to the pejorative notion that conventionally normative negativity is ultimately negative.

cerned with his own interior filtering, processing, and reacting "equipment" that he finds little time to examine the actions, *qua* actions, of others. He prefers to see these actions as a complex of blips on his own radar equipment. Possessed with a high degree of objectification and consciousness within himself, he becomes more beguiled by his own reaction to phenomena than by the phenomena themselves. He begins to consider himself a locus of processes which are themselves disconnected from other processes, both within himself and outside. This sense of disconnectedness accentuates his awareness of separation from others. Descriptions both from fictional and "real" alienated individuals frequently feature terms such as "capsules," "shells," "coverings," "layerings," etc. Metaphorically, such heroes live in "caves," "niches," "cocoon," "containers," and "bell jars." Separation is commonly perceived as a nearly concretized barrier between persons, as if individuals lived behind walls or communicated electronically with each other while living in adjacent Plexiglas containers.

A corollary feeling of falseness and facsimile pervades this disturbed sense of being. Hence, a whole series of descriptions around the idea of inauthenticity are replete, both in fictional and real experiences of alienated persons. People are seen as disguised or hiding behind masks. As Laing comments, the schizoid feels as if he is an actor, player, or impersonator, but never a person. Concepts of "sincerity," "self-confidence," or "authenticity" seem absurd and irrelevant. Relationship to others is accompanied by such intense self-consciousness that any kind of action seems overwhelmingly synthetic, hence phony or "plastic." Like sincerity, spontaneity appears to be a meaningless word, since the schizoid person is so wretchedly aware of the mechanisms underlying his specific actions. It is therefore inconceivable to him that interaction could ever be construed as spontaneous. Even in situations where spontaneity and abandon are difficult to abolish (such as while playing or copulating) the severely alienated person may still feel that he is always acting as an automaton.

The exquisitely schizoid person becomes, as it were, an amateur sociologist studying his own operations. He looks on himself as a collection of roles rather than a self. He is able to expound on the nature of his perceptions, integrations, and reactions. However, the tragedy is that in contrast to the use that sociologists make of role-

playing (as an analytic device), the alienated person begins to believe that that is all he is—a desiccated structural model.

He sees himself as a puppet cued by social circumstances which exact ritualized performances from him. His irritation about the inevitability of this is counterbalanced by one major consolation. This consists of his affection for his own machinery—that is, his own processes and parts. This becomes the most stable and reliable area in his encapsulated, ontological scheme. He enjoys the splendid private awareness of his own internal equipment, which he feels (most of the time) that others cannot see. Life then becomes a series of private mental pictures which generate excitement partly because they are secret from others.

In the poignant short story *Paul's Case* Cather grasps the allure and excitement of these consoling inner experiences.

Several of Paul's teachers had a theory that his imagination had been perverted by garish fiction; but the truth was, he scarcely ever read at all. The books at home were not such as would either tempt or corrupt a youthful mind, and as for reading the novels that some of his friends urged upon him—well, he got what he wanted much more quickly from music; any sort of music, from an orchestra to a barrel organ. He needed only the spark, the indescribable thrill that made his imagination master of his senses, and he could make plots and pictures enough of his own. It was equally true that he was not stage-struck—not, at any rate, in the usual acceptance of that expression. He had no desire to become an actor, any more than he had to become a musician. He felt no necessity to do any of these things; what he wanted was to see, to be in the atmosphere, float on the wave of it, to be carried out, blue league after blue league, away from everything.⁴

A similarly poignant illustration of the connection between being and self-alienation is illustrated by Raskolnikov's planning of a murder in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.

He could not imagine, for instance, that he would sometime leave off thinking, get up and simply go there. . . . Even his last experiment [i.e., his visit with the object of a final survey of the place] was simply an attempt at an experiment, far from being the real thing, as though one should say, "Come, let us go and try it—why dream about it!" and at once he had broken down and had run away cursing, in a frenzy with himself. Meanwhile it would seem, as regards the moral question, that his analysis was complete: his

casuistry had become keen as a razor, and he could not find rational objections in himself. But in the last resort, he simply ceased to believe in himself and doggedly, slavishly sought arguments in all directions, fumbling for them, as though someone were forcing and drawing him to it.⁹

Inauthenticity as a Touchstone for Action

The problem of ontological insecurity has been beautifully expressed by Laing. However, falseness and inauthenticity are *goals*, not merely concomitants. The schizoid disguise is not a side product or mere resultant of social pressures, but rather an essential ingredient which makes performance possible, as in the illustration concerning Raskolnikov cited above.

The portentousness of any action, significant or insignificant, is, as it were, divested of its threat if the action pretends that it never really quite happens. This reveals the negativity that accompanies this state of separateness. Ideas on personal change or the initiation of any new action seem heroic, radical, and terrifying. This portentous attitude toward change pertains not only to major existential crises, when one might expect such anxiety, but equally to even the most mundane actions.

One is reminded of Prufrock's dilemma in T. S. Eliot's poem:

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.¹⁰

It is as if decisions to eat, part one's hair, or take a walk are beset with the highest consequentiality. In severe schizoid states all actions call to mind ontological concerns. The fear is that unless a real experience can be modified into a pseudoexperience, the anxiety over the situation may be overwhelming.

It is striking that in most of the literature, both popular and scientific, this negativity over anticipated change is projected onto the fickleness or intransigence of others. Because of the nature of his introspections, the schizoid individual's thesis is that all behavior occurs on the basis of reaction to a constantly frightening, malignant environment. Nelson has also written to this point. In a critical review he states:

Along with the other charismatics of our day, Laing runs away from the problematical and predicamental aspects of human existence. To suppose that every influence exerted by every individual upon any

other individual is lethal, is to be trapped in nightmare. Unhappily, as is true of the pneumatics of our time, Laing's supposition is that of a one-person universe—a universe in which only the Transcendental Self has reality.²⁶

The way in which this projection of negativity is handled in Laing's and others' descriptions of schizoid states and schizophrenia has not received much critical attention, in contrast to the enthusiastic response to his sympathetic phenomenological depiction of schizophrenia.

Holbrook, however, has teased out Laing's implicit acceptance of negativity in an essay analyzing *The Divided Self*, *The Self and Others*, and *The Politics of Experience*. In what he calls the "Death Circuit," Holbrook conducts a literary and psychoanalytic inspection of Laing's negative position on ontology, alluding to Sylvia Plath, Dylan Thomas, Winnicott, Fairbairn, and Bowlby. He writes:

Laing's problem, I believe, is that he sees that what is necessary is "dissolution of identification." He misinterprets that, however, as dissolution of the ego. Moreover, he is so terrified of relationship in which genuine feeling is involved that the later stages of maturation or the growth of independence appear largely meaningless to him. He cannot abide mutuality. He would not, I believe, understand Winnicott's emphasis on the positive, reparative work that has to go on between mother and child. By contrast, Laing understands disintegration, but seems less to believe in integration. Thus, he cannot emphasize growth in relational therapy, nor can he see any hope in "contributing in" to the family and social order. The "rebirth" he offers is an extra-personal cosmic affair; it is, above all, not "weak" in the recognition that we may after all be no more than human.

According to Guntrip, by contrast, what is needed is an atmosphere in which instead of seeking a Wagnerian territory of transcendental mysticism, we accept our ego-weakness (as Sylvia Plath cries in a poem, "O love, O embryo")—and begin from there, in our needs for one another and our needs *to be*. Laing's intemperate mysticism is in fact a further contribution to the prevalent "taboo on weakness" which is surely the most dangerous tendency in our era.¹⁷

The problem is that those anxieties about action, called up by the need to act, are handled in the two ways mentioned before. Either the baleful aspects of an "insane" external world are held

responsible for such excessive anxiety, or the "creativity" of these states of terrified withdrawal are depicted as beautiful.

One need not totally deny the truth of either of these observations. However, a problem is encountered when these accounts are offered as sufficient and complete conspiratorial and psychedelic explanations to account for schizoid states and schizophrenia. At best, such theorizing is structurally weak in not examining the interactional dimensions of madness.

The "Beauty" of Psychotic Disintegration

Beauty is generally imputed to psychotic disintegration in an impressionistic way, clinicians or novelists citing exceptional individuals whose creativity shines through their psychotic episodes. Even in these instances, which are certainly exceptions rather than the ordinary experience, beauty is inferred by the outside observer. When not dealing with exceptional individuals, psychosis can be depicted beautifully and sympathetically in the hands of Laing and others, communicating the meaning and significance of psychotic dissolution. As in the portrayal of any character in a well-written tragedy, the author is able to make the person believable, heroic, and, hence, beautiful. Psychotic disintegration is glamorized for aesthetic purposes. The novelist not only has the prerogative but the necessity to do this.

However, it is more difficult to justify the attempts of scholarly writers when they uncritically indulge poetic license. One expects a scientist-clinician to be able to distinguish between writing beautifully about tragedy, and the actuality of experiencing tragedy. When the scientific author fails to make this distinction, intentionally or otherwise, he is engaged in a highly promotive exercise.

Whatever else the experience of madness is, it rarely is beautiful to those involved in it. Autobiographical depictions of insanity—such as those by Schreber, Beers, and Hannah Greene—rarely suggest much of comfort, let alone beauty.* Similarly, fictional accounts

* A recent account of a schizophrenic episode has been published by Bowers.⁸ This article uses a diary written during a young man's disintegration and includes corollary observations by others of events in his life. Bowers quotes the patient's later opinion (following recovery) of his diary account of madness as being "so bitter, I really can't see how I ever wrote it. It doesn't bother me to read it because it just doesn't seem like me."³

of madness or poetry depicting depravity and isolation may be beautiful because of their organization, style, and poignancy, but hardly because of their content. In a quite remarkable way, Laing concretistically accepts all of the paradoxes and negativity in the experience of psychosis and attributes beauty to the content as well as the style. Again, this seems to be mainly a poetical construction that he, as an outside observer, creates, rather than what is felt by the severely schizoid or psychotic person himself.

The manner in which continental existential writers such as Camus and Kafka react to alienation has been previously discussed elsewhere. Their fictional characters do not simply accept the absurd, incongruent, and savage aspects of human society. Rather, they comply with society not through a perfunctory conformity, but by apparently relishing and amplifying these incongruencies. The ontological world of these fictional heroes becomes substantiated through the very presence of these incongruencies and inconsistencies.^{20d} As Knoff²² has commented, the process of creating meaninglessness, then, itself becomes centrally meaningful.* The point is that this kind of acceptance is not a passive process but a very active, dialectical procedure toward self-estrangement.

Mechanisms within these estranged individuals can be seen as actively sought goals rather than simple compliance with inexorable, fatalistic ends pressed on them by an insane society. They are not, as misleadingly portrayed, released into a splendid new world of a starkly isolated self. (A tabular comparison of psychedelic and psychotic experiences constructed by Siegler et al.³⁰ clarifies Laing's uncritical beautification of madness.†)

Interpretation of the Negativity in Severe Self-Alienation

A dynamic explanation for the need to foster and emphasize the "beautiful and negative" experience of self-alienation has not been

* Knoff examines the resignation of Camus' hero Mersault as an active process of resolution when he is faced with the inanities of human existence. Knoff's point is that meaninglessness is partly sought after rather than passively accepted.

† Although these authors are guilty of overkill, their contrasts between genuinely psychedelic experience and the usual kinds of psychotic experience eloquently make the point that extreme estrangement or madness are ordinarily not beautiful. Their scheme is too complex to display here but takes into account time dimension, space dimension, feeling, cognition, perception, and identity.

entirely clarified. A theoretical formulation for the psychoanalytic basis of mechanisms underlying the schizoid position has been laid down by Klein, Fairbairn, Guntrip, and others. These interpretations take into account both the individual and his social interactions through object-relations theory. Here we will attempt to account for one aspect of the deepening of the schizoid position from the dynamic standpoint. Here *dynamic* is used in the sense that Rapaport has defined it, as an "ultimate determiner of all behavior."²⁷

In schizoid conditions the drives toward object relationships are turned inward.* This has, of course, been repeatedly posited in virtually all commentaries on schizoid conditions before and after Bleuler. Fairbairn has attempted to account for the schizoid dilemma in two distinct ways. Guntrip summarizes the development of his position:

Fairbairn at first regarded the schizoid's withdrawal from objects as due to his fear that his unsatisfied needs, which the object failed to meet, had become so greedy and devouring that his love had become even more dangerous than his hate. This phenomenon is clearly met with in analysis, but it is only halfway to the more complete explanation toward which Fairbairn's work developed as he discarded impulse psychology, namely, that it is at bottom a question of an infantile ego unable to cope with its outer world. The schizoid is split in his growing emotional life by the inconsistency of his primary parental objects and becomes a prey to loss of internal unity, radical weakness, and helplessness. While still partly struggling to deal with the outer world, he also partly withdraws from it and becomes detached or out of touch, finding refuge in his internal fantasy world.^{14a}

Underlying both of these explanations, Fairbairn would presumably see a retroversion of basic drives toward satisfactory relationships with objects. Originally craving attachment to the outside, the schizoid later becomes occupied with the objectification of his internal mental life.

This process of self-objectification has many facets; portraying

* Presented out of context, the importance of drive theory in psychoanalysis may appear to be overemphasized or even a bit atavistic. It should be remembered that Rapaport's analysis is concerned with the structure of psychoanalytic theory viewed as ten compartmentalizations, only one of which is concerned with *drive*. Discussion of the relationship of drives to other structural elements in the theory is beyond the scope of this paper.

it in a meaningful way here would require an exposition of case material and a review of theoretical writings. In lieu of this, only one characteristic will be highlighted—namely, the use of objectification to denigrate or constrain the individual. This would be the use of introspection to arrive at what Laing depicts as states of “engulfment,” “implosion,” and “petrification.”

The process of self-objectification as insight is generally heralded as “good” both in religious, political, and psychotherapeutic contexts. It is therefore difficult for some psychotherapists, existentially oriented or otherwise, to grasp the destructive and paralytic aspects of self-objectification when used by the schizoid person. The negativity and terror encountered in such introspection are handled by the patient in three ways. As mentioned before, the negativity can be projected simplistically onto the external world. Alternatively, the negativity may be made to appear attractive: a beauty may be imputed to the realization of depravity, as in the artistic creations of Edgar Allen Poe, Hieronymous Bosch, or Jean Genet. A final way to dispose of the problems of negativity is to suggest that all actions are only relative in significance and value. This last view dispenses with the need to deal with negativity at all.

My contention is that irrespective of the mechanism, the goal of such severe schizoid introspection is to reify a sense of insubstantiality and disconnectedness—a sense of conditionality and “non-being.” *For the schizoid individual, ontological insecurity becomes the touchstone for all performances.*

The formulation might be stated in the following fashion: “If I think that I am not, then I may be!” The complicated problems of ontology (“being”) are solved by transformation into their opposite (“nonbeing”). Hence, one is “authentic” as long as one is aware of being disconnected or “inauthentic.”

Remaining conceptually and ideationally disconnected then becomes the major (ontological) security operation. All questions of interaction and involvement are tested in this fundamental security context. The question is “Will this action disturb my nonbeing?” If it does not, then action is possible—whether it be parting one’s hair, eating a peach, marrying, or running for the presidency.

Authentic, spontaneous communion is antithetical and threatening to the security operations of the alienated person. Security resides in the schizoid person’s capacity to conceptualize himself as just

another social object—a mechanism, a thing. At an extreme, the capacity to visualize his own extinction and death as an objective, insignificant, and cosmic event gives a schizoid person the sense of security that he can portray himself in other likewise fictional performances with “real” individuals. In a manner that nonreflective persons find baffling, the schizoid person is able to introspect on colossal internal ontological threats but pales at notions of union outside of himself. This accounts for how he may spend an entire morning conceptualizing his own depravity and insubstantiality, with dramatic fantasies of suicide, enjoying the controlled terror called up by these reflections, but feels incapable of picking up the telephone to ask a young woman to attend a concert with him later in the week. Anxiety-free performance seems to depend crucially on the capacity to believe that events only seem to happen, rather than actually happen.

The relationship of these negative feelings to the constraints on performance can be explained through the use of Fairbairn’s insight into the internalization of bad partial objects during infancy and childhood. It has been mentioned that the process of associating with a surfeit of intermittently obnoxious social objects during childhood produces anxiety in the conduct of social relationships. The need to filter out, control, and modulate the behavior of oneself and others gives rise to an overawareness of the mechanistic nature of future interactions. If afflicted with an overabundance of these experiences, the developing child is left with a residual sense of his own idiosyncrasy, negativity, and strangeness. His anxiety over the feelings he anticipates encountering in interactions with others tends to be exorbitantly high. His anxiety over the negative quality of his own actions is correspondingly elevated. The ontological security which accompanies the thought that “Things do not really happen” or “I am really not here” is used as a protective device against the experience of severe anxiety about failure. Furthermore, it engenders a positive version of his own facsimile. That is to say, instead of saying, “I feel as if I am not being sincere or spontaneous,” the person instead declaims, “*All* of my actions are insubstantial.” This latter statement is then protective of the schizoid’s own feelings since “Things aren’t really happening.” It also provides an ontological catch-all to justify any subsequent event that might occur in consequence of his own personal behavior.

Seen in this way, the ontic quest of the alienated is not so much a solipsistic enterprise designed to discover the true and real nature of things. Rather, it is a security device designed to protect the individual from the anticipation of painful interactions and to moderate the potentially strong negative feelings he has about himself.

Before referring to the interpersonal relations of the schizoid individual, one final aspect of his personal ontology should be developed—namely, the maintenance of a sense of disconnectedness, or alienation, from others.* The concentration on self as a fractionated series of complex private processes leads to an accentuation of idiosyncrasy and differentness and, most important, distance from others. Conceiving of himself as an objectified social “atom,” like all other social objects, he concludes that his own intricate self is as different from others as if he were a separate species. Through his observation of others (at a distance) he detects banality, triteness, and naïvety. His views of the performances of others are used by him as further evidence of his own peculiarity, and at the same time as evidence of the strangeness and superficiality of others.

The differences between himself and others may also be noted in terms of feelings. The alienated person may intellectually understand that others are experiencing anxiety, uncertainty, and hesitation. However, he sees only their superficial behavior, which appears calm when compared to his own inner state of turmoil. Failing to realize what others may feel, he condemns himself for having such exorbitant states of feeling. He simultaneously disclaims the meaning of the superficial performances of others through smugness, arrogance, or envy.

The important point is that he maintains a sense of discontinuity between his experiences and the experiences of others. As Daly⁶ has pointed out, however, the alienated person continues to make attempts to continue to relate despite these discontinuities. Withdrawal does not simply diminish the kind and number of interactions that the schizoid person hazards. Safety can also be realized through a radical denial of the conventional meaning inherent in his performances with other persons. The individual is therefore free to

* Laing talks of this maintenance of boundary (internal coherence) as “inner honesty” and as the pathological need for control. While he relates this defensive system to a lack of ontological security, I am taking the opposite position that the maintaining of this dividedness is necessary in order to establish ontological security.

vacillate toward and away from people, depending upon the urgency of his feelings connected with these polar states. Each strategy, however, controls or constitutes feeling, one by reducing contact, and the second through the ruse of consciously denying any personal feeling of significance to interpersonal events.

The notion of overcoming separation from others creates the highest level of anxiety in the alienated person. Again, Daly⁷ has discussed this basic conflict in terms of schizoid rule-following in approach-avoidance conflicts centering on attempted communion with real persons, ideas, and emotional supplies. In Daly's analysis, the attempts to connect with gratifying objects, to commit himself to ideational systems, or to satisfy his compelling desires are all met with increasing anxiety as satisfactory resolution approaches. Each of these situations terrifies him because it signals the loss of his secure isolation and a return of the insufferable conflicts which originally led to the creation of the defensive position. The severely alienated person, therefore, fears dependency gratification because he visualizes it as an incorporation into a larger engulfing object (which would obliterate the internal definition of himself, and, hence, would be a kind of death). Similarly, an ideological commitment would confront the schizoid person with a threatening dependency on others who might share his ideology. This again would profoundly upset a person whose ontological security is primarily based upon exclusive communion with his own internal objects.* Obviously, authentic relations with others, even idealized persons, are threatening and potentially disintegrating.⁸

Similarly, the spontaneous expression of impulses is threatening insofar as the meaning connected with this behavior cannot be modulated and may therefore expose the person to feelings which he cannot manage. Such spontaneity, moreover, is connected with one other preoccupation—namely, the notion of transparency. The severely schizoid person operates as the technician busy twirling dials and pulling levers behind the public screen of his social performances. He supposes that the insubstantiality of his own per-

* One of the differences between persons labeled "schizoid personalities" versus those labeled "schizophrenic" is the schizoid persons' reluctance to embrace a radical ideological scheme which might psychotically "explain" himself to others. It is as if the schizoid person continues to be ambivalent about both ambient ideologies as well as explanations of his own and others' actions. The schizophrenic finally makes a radical choice and fixedly defends his private ideology.

formance might be glimpsed by others if he were to act more casually. Spontaneity, therefore, would allow the outsider to look in on his disheveled apparatus and see the frenzy, the disguise, and, worst of all, the "badness" and the loneliness which are his hallmarks.

LATENT SCHIZOID CONDITIONS AND THE ADAPTATION TO AN ALIENATING WORLD

The foregoing description of schizoid states has focused on states of severe estrangement or self-alienation which, except in the most romanticized and poetical reconstructions, are usually painful and maladaptive. In describing these gross maladaptations, we have not implied that schizoid phenomena are necessarily pathological and maladaptive. The trenchant formulations of the existential writers (fictional, clinical, and scholarly) have portrayed the fact that less severe schizoid adaptations are all too adaptive to living in a society which itself is severely dissociated and schizoid.

This essay has focused on the most severe states of estrangement; it presented a psychological explanation for these conditions, stressing interactional interpretations derived from object-relations theory. Milder, nonsymptomatic, "adaptive" schizoid mechanisms abound, particularly in persons living in industrialized, product-oriented, technocratic societies. Sadly, such adaptations are so general that they appear normal and escape being defined as pathology or sickness. These adaptations have been richly documented by others but will be briefly sketched here.

The foregoing sections have principally described individuals whose "conditionality of being" is exceedingly pronounced and whose relationships to others are ridden with paralyzing anxiety states. A much more common, but considerably less disabling situation obtains in those many individuals who visualize their interactions with others as a series of intricate, vapid role performances, but who, despite this, are fully capable of mastering the various quadrilles, minuets, and tarantellas dictated by the nature of their social relationships. Such behavior, however, is predicated on the same mechanism that the more severely schizoid person employs, that is, the condition that none of the performances ultimately matters. This is furthermore accompanied by the consoling awareness that their "real self" exists at an internal, subjective level, at a safe distance from the social phenomena in which the self participates. Alienated individuals

functioning in this way do not ordinarily seek psychiatric treatment unless they suddenly become aware of a special sense of loneliness, or their performance in the objective social reality is sensed as deficient by themselves or others.

These individuals survive as long as they are able to keep inside and outside clearly separated. They live, as it were, in two worlds and learn not to expect congruity between the internal self and the social reality. Problems of ethics and integrity are always contextually and operationally determined. Such persons are sustained during their workday by the ethics and goals of their organizations. Measurement of the integrity and accomplishment of their family is similarly ascriptive, externalized, and objective. For example, they may evaluate their family by the way in which they measure up to community standards in the appearance of their home, their acquisition of certain consumer products, and their maintenance of expected social rituals. If the family "fails" (wives slip into alcoholism, sons desert to communes, mothers are sent to nursing homes, or daughters expire of drug overdose), this is ascribed to deficiencies in the *culture*. This does not imply that these individuals do not mourn these untoward occurrences, but that they are ultimately insulated from them. They are prepared to rationalize such unpropitious endings (he paid for his wife's psychoanalysis; he used to go to football games with his son; he took his mother to the social security office; he sent his daughter to an excellent secretarial school).

The alarming fact, however, is that their very schizoid predisposition keeps them existentially "well." The culturally sustained dissociation or splitting allows them to live with thermonuclear threats, environmental destruction, and nationalized savagery. Such alienation also fosters protean adaptations and diminished expectation for meaning and transcendence through work, family, friendship, and recreation.

REIFICATION AND THE PROBLEM OF SURPLUS NEGATIVITY

At several junctures in this essay, the issue of the unintentional promotion of both the fact and "badness" of alienation has been raised. The term *alienation* has become a generic expression for diverse anxieties, violences, imperfections, discontinuities, and separations in Western life. The extraordinary flexibility and vagueness of the term

plus its mainly negativistic constructions and connotations make it similar to the panchreston *sin*, which was similarly taxonomized and codified in Medieval Christianity.* It has been suggested that alienation has both supplanted and supplemented sin as a generic concept for depicting a series of defective aspects of human existence. One must ask, therefore, to what extent do those who codify, describe, and broaden the definitions of alienation contribute to the experience of alienation.

In contemporary demonology, the witches, wizards, and other satanic forces of the past have been replaced by what Robert Daly has called the Spectres of Technicism.⁷ Diverse discrepancies in idealized existence are accounted for not through the Fall of Man, but through man's loss of a natural paradise. Alienation also readily subsumes disaffiliations in the family, disorganizations in national and international relations, and those ubiquitous experiences of indifference, violence, and prejudice occurring among classes, cultures, and individuals. Finally, in its amazing comprehensiveness, alienation is easily applied to all manner of individual existential experiences—especially those which incorporate loneliness, idiosyncrasy, and madness.

The manner in which these various species of alienation have been reified by psychologists, psychiatrists, theologians, and sociologists is the subject of an analysis by Joachim Israel.¹⁹ He points out that empirical theories in the social and psychological sciences are preceded by models of an implicit, normative nature, whose covert presuppositions delimit the ways in which various "theories" in these disciplines are formulated. These basic underlining (normative) presuppositions are concerned with an idealization of a covertly postulated "natural existence of man." Such implicit postulates strongly affect the positing of values underlying human existence. Such values are implicitly assumed but not clarified in most models. These unexamined assumptions, implicit in much psychological and sociological work, quite obviously affect both the outcome and the interpretation of research. This is even more evident in sociophilosophical commentary about alienation, in which the fact of alienation is held as given, just as the fact of man's Fall from Paradise and Grace were

* *Panchreston* is Hardin's word for overgeneralized expressions which, in attempting to explain all, essentially explain nothing.¹⁶

held as basic assumptions in previous centuries. One must wonder, therefore, about the status of empirical and clinical research on alienation—research which implicitly assumes that the character of such alienation is already present and given. The point of citing Israel here is that his suggestions on the existence of reified theories in psychology and sociology suggest that, without intending it, scholars within these fields ineluctably perpetuate the notion of a negativized separateness and discontinuity. Having implicitly done this, they then propose to discover and analyze the empirical and logical order of things in the real Western world. Not unexpectedly, they frequently discover “alienation.” This analysis suggests a further question: Do social scientists, psychiatrists, and culture critics who, while intending to describe and exhibit certain salient characteristics of Western society, actually create, reify, and reinforce the existence of the very phenomena they purport to study?

We are not suggesting that there is no evidence for conspicuous malaise in contemporary technological societies. However, could it be that such commentary and research may inadvertently sketch an idealized depiction of existence which makes all actual human behavior deficient or “bad”?

This same situation holds for psychiatry and psychoanalysis, where the conception of normality ordinarily is not empirically or statistically investigated but rather is connected to implicit, idealized models of personality functioning, against which actual adaptations are invidiously compared. Fortunately, the subject of what constitutes normality is belatedly receiving interest within psychiatry from both logical and empirical standpoints. However, explication of these issues remains to be done.

As a corollary to the reification of alienation, the prominent negative connotations of the term continue to suggest that the “real nature” of social and psychological man is both evil and denaturalized. If the normative idealized standards underlying such formulations are not made explicit, many “scientific” descriptions of the nature of man will continue to implicate him as hopelessly “bad” and estranged. As under the previous rubric of sin, the discovery of imperfection and badness can be ubiquitous. By reference to either “sin” or “alienation,” nearly all aspects of human behavior can be seen as unideal, disconnected, fragmented in some way, and hence “bad.” Using the rhetoric of alienation, man’s separate-

ness and negativity is promulgated just as it was through the concept of sin in earlier times.

However, the interesting and fundamental difference between alienation and sin is that sin basically implicated the individual in his own specific imperfections, which had occasioned a separation and alienation from God, temporal institutions, and his fellow man. The post-Enlightenment view of alienation is radically different in emphasis. The onus for badness and consequent separation has now been largely displaced onto the terrible incongruities inherent in man's collective social life. Although individual persons are implicated in contributing to these conditions, the overwhelming blame for the malignant separateness, meaninglessness, violence, and thwarting of affection is attributed by man to his *systems of social organization*. Another important difference between the panchrestons *sin* and *alienation* is that the concept of sin was directly related to a comprehensive, cosmological frame of existence. Human deficiencies of awareness of anguish were directly related to the then "existential" conditions. In other words, there were very specific formulas for examining individual morality in terms of ultimate significance. Despite the impact of recent culture critics, the concept of alienation does not readily lead to connections between individual actions and ultimate values. Questions of an individual morality, if raised at all, are answered scientifically and relativistically in the specific contexts in which they occur. More often, however, questions of individual morality are answered by a nebulous indictment of "society," "technology," or some other collective cause. Rather than leading to the authentic existential experience of guilt, or "badness," such a displacement seems to foster an exoneration or rationalization and hence a lowering of concern about the need for any kind of ultimate or coherent set of values.

There are some prominent dangers in the unexamined reification and negativizing of alienation. Kenneth Keniston has written brilliantly on this:

Most fundamentally, this shift is part and symptom of a more general "loss of faith" in the West, seen in the movement from "positive values" (ends which men should seek) to a "negative morality" (which elucidates the evils and terrors men should avoid), and in our widespread doubt as to whether there are *any* values which can be legitimately and passionately held. This transition has often been

discussed: it begins with the breakdown of medieval certainty, progresses through centuries of increasing rational skepticism and "demythologizing" of religion, and culminates in the cynicism and sense of ideological defeat that have followed our two world wars. Nietzsche's "transvaluation of values" has taken place. But the old creeds have not been replaced, as he hoped, by values more adequate to what man might become, but by the value nihilism against which he explicitly warned. The hammer has been retained, but not the concept of a transcendent man above all men so far envisaged.

. . . Every age, too, has its characteristic balance between positive, educative, hortatory, constructive, imperative, visionary, utopian myths, and negative, deterrent, cautionary, warning, direful, destructive, and counter-utopian myths. In some periods of Western history, images of violence, demonism, destructiveness, sorcery, and witchcraft have prevailed; in others, myths of blessedness, justice, co-operation, and universal concordance with divine order have dominated.

. . . Few would disagree that our own time is one of predominantly negative, deterrent, or even satanic myths. Our dissociated fantasy is fantasy of violence, cruelty, and crime, presented ostensibly as a warning, but often as a stimulant.²¹

Of course, it is inconceivable to imagine a society in which some negative mythologizing did not flourish. The concern of Keniston and of this current essay is the discovery of such mythologizing within the scientific and scholarly community. The danger is that Western scholars will continue in their pessimistic search for denaturalized man—fallen now from the "grace" of his physical and social environment. They will continue to look for inherently malevolent features in societies which are *a priori* depicted to be ravenous and destructive.

Again, this is not to suggest either that individual men are not alienated or that social organizations are not potentially malignant. It is to suggest that such loneliness and malignancy are at least partly a projection of people who see these conditions as inevitable.

REFERENCES

1. BLEULER, E. *Dementia praecox* (1912). Transl. J. Zinkien. New York: International Universities Press, 1950.
2. BOOK, J. A. *Genetical Aspects of Schizophrenic Psychoses*. In D. D. Jackson (Ed.), *The Etiology of Schizophrenia*. New York: Basic Books, 1960, pp. 43-46.
3. BOWERS, M. *The Onset of Psychosis*. *Psychiatry*, Vol. 28, 1965, pp. 346-358.

4. CATHER, W. Paul's Case. *Youth and the Bright Medusa*. New York: Knopf, 1920, p. 56.
5. DABROWSKI, K. *Positive Disintegration*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1964.
6. DALY, R. W. Schizoid Role Following. *Psychoanalytic Review*, Vol. 55, 1968, pp. 400-412.
7. ————. The Specters of Technicism. *Psychiatry*, Vol. 33, 1970.
8. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 2nd ed. Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1968, p. 42.
9. DOSTOYEVSKY, F. *Crime and Punishment*. New York: Modern Library, 1950, pp. 71-72.
10. ELIOT, T. S. The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock. *Collected Poems of T. S. Eliot*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1934.
11. FAIRBAIRN, W. R. D. *An Object-Relations Theory of the Personality*. New York: Basic Books, 1954, p. 233.
12. FENICHEL, O. *Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*. New York: Norton, 1945, pp. 463-541: (a) 33-117.
13. FROMM, E. *The Sane Society*. New York: Holt, 1955.
14. GUNTRIP, H. *Personality Structure and Human Interaction*. New York: International Universities Press, 1964, (a) p. 233.
15. ————. *Psychoanalytic Theory, Therapy, and the Self*. New York: Basic Books, 1971.
16. HARDIN, G. Meaninglessness of the Word *Protoplasm*. *Scientific Monthly*, Vol. 82, 1956, pp. 112-120.
17. HOLBROOK, D. R. D. Laing and the Death Circuit. *Encounter*, Vol. 31, 1968, pp. 38-45.
18. HORNEY, K. *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*. New York: Norton, 1963.
19. ISRAEL, J. *Alienation: From Marx to Modern Sociology*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1971.
20. JOHNSON, F. (Ed.). *Alienation: Concept, Term, and Meanings*. New York: Seminar Press, 1973, pp. 3-24: (a) 41-46; (b) 29-31; (c) 34-41; (d) 22-24.
21. KENISTON, K. Alienation and the Decline of the Utopia. *American Scholar*, Vol. 29, 1960, pp. 182-186.
22. KNOFF, W. A Psychiatrist Reads Camus' "The Stranger." *Psychiatric Opinion*, Vol. 6, 1969, pp. 19-25
23. KOHUT, H. Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, Vol. 7, 1959, pp. 459-483.
24. LAING, R. D. *The Divided Self*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965.
25. ————. *The Politics of Experience*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1967.
26. NELSON, B. Afterword: A Medium with a Message: R. D. Laing. *Salmagundi Review*, Vol. 16, 1971, pp. 199-201.
27. RAPAPORT, D. The Structure of Psychoanalytic Theory. New York: International Universities Press, 1960, p. 47.
28. REICH, W. *Character Analysis*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1949.
29. SCHACHT, R. *Alienation*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970, pp. 115-145.
30. SIEGLER, M., H. OSMOND, AND H. MANN. Laing's Model of Madness. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 115, 1969, pp. 947-958.
31. *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*. Springfield, Mass.: Merriam, 1968.

State University Hospital
of the Upstate Medical Center
750 East Adams Street
Syracuse, N.Y. 13210

The Psychoanalytic Review
Vol. 62, No. 3, 1975