IN THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES, EUROPEANS BEGAN TO ENCOUNTER foreign peoples and the belief systems of other lands. Some of their most widely read books described people from far away, such as the Chinese, the Japanese, and Native Americans. Europeans were amazed by their similarities to and differences from others. They were struck, for example, by how certain other cultures mistreated women, and equally struck by some other cultures' respect for the elderly. Until this time, Europeans believed that they had received the only moral code that ensured order and justice in society. They were amazed by missionaries reports of flourishing non-Christian cultures. This awareness of cultural difference was the impetus for many philosophers to struggle with the challenge of relativism, as can be seen, for example, in the works of Voltaire and Montesquieu (Kors, 1992).

One aspect of this development is particularly relevant to our topic of intersubjectivity: While Europeans were studying other cultures and peoples, they suddenly recognized that other people were also studying them. They realized that their culture was as strange to those of other cultures as other cultures were to them. Imagine Montesquieu's reaction when he met a Chinese person who had converted to Christianity while still in China and came to France with greatly idealized expectations of coming to see how a culture of Christians really lived. Montesquieu observed this Chinese convert observing him and recognized that the foreigner, the stranger, the other, the object of his own observation, was himself another subject, and that he, Montesquieu, was not
only an observing subject, but an observed object. It is this mutuality of recognition, this two-person psychology, that has been referred to as intersubjectivity.

The term intersubjectivity has been used in a variety of ways by philosophers and by psychoanalysts. Stolorow and colleagues introduced the term intersubjectivity into psychoanalysis (Stolorow, Atwood, and Ross, 1978), and for this group “intersubjectivity theory is a field theory or systems theory in that it seeks to comprehend psychological phenomena not as products of isolated intrapsychic mechanisms, but as forming at the interface of reciprocally interacting subjectivities” (Stolorow and Atwood, 1992, p. 1). For Stolorow, the term intersubjectivity denotes the principle of mutual regulation or mutual influence. Other theorists, however, use the term differently.

Benjamin’s (1988, 1992) work on intersubjectivity emphasizes mutual recognition as an intrinsic aspect of the development of the self. Regarding the clinical psychoanalytic situation, Benjamin (1990) writes that “an inquiry into the intersubjective dimension of the analytic encounter would aim to change our theory and practice so that ‘where objects were, subjects must be’” (p. 34). How it is that a person may come to recognize the other as an equivalent subject is the central problem that she, following Winnicott (1954-1955), attempts to address. Benjamin’s use of intersubjectivity emphasizes mutual recognition, whereas Stolorow’s stresses mutual regulation.

Stern (1985) explained that traditional psychoanalytic, ego-psychological, developmental theory had neglected the creation of mutually held mental states because of its overriding emphasis on the emergence of a more autonomous self through the separation-individuation process. In contrast, Stern cites Vygotsky’s notion of the “intermental,” Fairbairn’s conception of the newborn’s innate inter-personal relatedness, MacMurray’s philosophical idea of the field of the personal, and Sullivan’s interpersonal field theory, as influential examples of theorists outside of the psychoanalytic mainstream who were receptive to the study of intersubjectivity as a dyadic phenomena.

Fonagy (1991), building on recent developments in philosophy and infant research, described how individuals gradually develop their own theory of mind, an understanding of one’s own and others’ mental states. I think of Fonagy’s work as an attempt to elaborate a developmental line of intersubjectivity. He reviews the child’s progress from the first months of affect resonance with caregivers, through the empathic sensing and responding to the moods of the other that occurs at about eight months, to the understanding of others’ intentions as demonstrated in cooperative play (at about 14 months). These developments progress in the second and third year as the child becomes capable of reflecting on her or his own mental states and the mental states of others. The capacity to attribute a belief to another person is acquired by age three and one-half to four. According to Fonagy, “a more advanced level of a theory of mind which entails the ability to think about another person’s thoughts (beliefs about another person’s beliefs about beliefs) ... is probably not acquired fully until 6 years of age” (p. 641). As a typical clinical example of an interpretation that assumes a capacity for this level of sophisticated (intersubjective) perspective taking, Fonagy offers, “You think that people will be angry with you if they find out what you really feel about them.”

Ogden (1986, 1989, 1994) has systematically elaborated a theory of the interplay of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in development, psychopathology, and psychoanalytic treatment. Ogden’s conception of analytic intersubjectivity places the central emphasis on its dialectical nature. His elaboration of the contributions of Freud, Klein, and Winnicott culminates in the development of his original concept of the “analytic third,” which is neither subject nor object, but is jointly created (intersubjectively) by the analytic pair. “The intersubjective and the individually subjective each create, negate, and preserve the other,” and created out of the dialectical interplay of these forces is “the intersubjective analytic third” (1994, p. 64).

Natterson (1991) and Natterson and Friedman (1995), who favor a radically intersubjective approach, presented a detailed comparison of a variety of uses of the term intersubjectivity in contemporary psychoanalytic theory. Dunn (1995) provided a thoughtful critique of a range of modern intersubjectivity theories. Elsewhere (Aron, 1996), I compare and contrast a variety of meanings of the term intersubjectivity, discuss the various psychoanalytic traditions of intersubjectivity, and trace their clinical implications.

Each of these varying formulations of subjectivity and intersubjectivity has momentous clinical consequences. How we understand the nature and development of human subjectivity and intersubjectivity;
how we view the clinical analytic situation as inherently intersubjective; how we conceive of the place in the analytic situation for an exploration of the patient's and the analyst's subjectivity; how we understand the creation of the analytic space, the analytic third, or an analytic object; and how we envision the relationship between the intrasubjective and the intersubjective—our answers to these questions have a significant impact on our conceptualization and practice of clinical psychoanalysis.

Speaking of “intersubjectivity theory” or of an intersubjective approach to psychoanalysis does not presuppose a specific or clearly defined meaning today. The term is being used in many different ways by a wide variety of theorists and so to be clear one must specify precisely how the term is being used. Although for a time it seemed that Stolorow’s contributions were most widely connected with the term intersubjectivity, today it seems that the term intersubjectivity, like the term relational, is generally used broadly to convey a wide range of revisionist, generally post-Freudian theories. Steingart (1995), however, has argued that analysts who practice in a (more or less usual) Freudian manner have their own beliefs and conceptions about the existence of intersubjectivity.

In the articles that follow, the term intersubjectivity is used to refer to post-Freudian, revisionist psychoanalytic thinking, which is often described as relational or two-person psychology. Labeling psychoanalytic theories is often complex and misleading in that among so-called intersubjectivity theorists, many argue for the need to maintain both intersubjective and intrapsychic perspectives; similarly, many relational analysts propose that we maintain a dialectic tension between one-person and two-person psychologies. The following articles and discussions are intended to further our thinking about these theoretical questions and their clinical implications.

Turning more directly to the papers from the symposium, “The Meanings and Practice of Intersubjectivity in Psychoanalysis,” we begin with Sam Gerson’s “Neutrality, Resistance, and Self-Disclosure in an Intersubjective Psychoanalysis.” Gerson not only explores the principles of neutrality and resistance from within an intersubjective framework, but also considers the nature of enactments and the technical use of self-disclosure—both aspects of psychoanalytic practice that have come to the forefront of clinicians’ interest. He argues, and illus-
needs to be done to clarify the meaning and clinical implications of the term. The various uses of the terms one-person and two-person psychology, relational perspectives, intrapsychic, interactive, interpersonal, and intersubjective continue to both clarify and obscure developments in psychoanalytic theory and practice. Undoubtedly, these papers will lead to further conversation, dialogue, and debate so that even if we do not end up with any real consensus regarding the use of these terms, there will be enough "simulated consensus" (Jacques, 1991) that we may express our disagreements with each other more precisely.

REFERENCES


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