Understanding Intersubjectivity

Psychoanalytic Formulations
And Their Philosophical Underpinnings

INTERSUBJECTIVITY has become a topic of considerable interest among psychoanalysts and psychologists. The term intersubjectivity refers in the most basic sense to the interaction between two subjects: myself and another person, or self and other. The intersubjective field is an area of common engagement in which my individual subjectivity is articulated and communicated. This article seeks to help the psychoanalytic practitioner and theoretician come to terms with the current discussion and debate on intersubjectivity by elaborating its basic psychoanalytic tenets, and by examining the philosophical premises on which they are based. In so doing, we aim to fill a gap in the psychoanalytic literature of intersubjectivity relating to the philosophical basis and history of the concept.

The introduction of philosophy into the discussion on intersubjectivity may strike some readers as odd. What is frequently overlooked by psychoanalysts and psychologists alike, however, is that intersubjectivity is a concept from European philosophy with a two-hundred-year-old history. Moreover, as clinicians involved in the daily vicissitudes of the analytic process, we tend to disregard the fact that theory always and inevitably influences the way we work and effects the underlying assumptions we hold about the nature of human relating.

As such, the study of intersubjectivity has broad implications for psychoanalytic theory and practice. It suggests that the work of analysis is located in understanding the nature of interaction between two subjectivities, thus highlighting the importance of the analyst’s own subjectivity within the analytic process. Whereas most psychoanalysts would agree with this denotation of intersubjectivity as relating to the dyadic relationship between the two individual subjectivities, there is less consensus about the definition and implications of the concept. Does intersubjectiv-
ity account for the individual and personal within the analytic process? Is the patient's or the analyst's subjectivity only a product of the intersubjective dyad? Are the terms intersubjective and interpersonal interchangeable? Is there one intersubjective theory or are there many?

In order to answer these questions, it is important to consider the way in which intersubjective theory is rooted in philosophy. Indeed, many of the significant differences between psychoanalytic theories of intersubjectivity can be traced back to specific differences in the philosophies that inspire them. We are thinking, in particular, of the work of Jessica Benjamin, Thomas Ogden, and Robert Stolorow and his colleagues. Though each of these psychoanalysts discusses the philosophers that have been important to him or her, there has not been a comparative presentation. Our primary purpose in this article is to introduce just enough philosophy to make it possible to differentiate the work of these intersubjective psychoanalysts on philosophical grounds. We are well aware that clinical psychoanalysts often feel that philosophy has little to do with what is most important to them. In showing how closely tied the thinking of Benjamin, Ogden, and Stolorow is to specific philosophical positions, we hope to interest psychoanalysts in the role philosophy plays in the formulation of ideas with direct clinical significance.

We begin with a section outlining the most relevant philosophical positions for intersubjective theory. Then, using these ideas, we move on to separate consideration of the work of Benjamin, Ogden, and Stolorow. We end with a brief integrative statement.

**Bridging Psychoanalysis and Philosophy**

Most psychoanalysts, psychologists, and psychiatrists are neither trained in nor familiar with philosophy. This has not always been true, and from our perspective, represents a deficit in our analytic education. William James, the founder of psychology in the United States, first achieved recognition and professional stature as a philosopher, and it was in that context that he recognized the merits of philosophy for understanding human behavior (Aron, 2000). Freud's relationship to philosophy was more tenuous, however. Freud revered such thinkers as Nietzsche and Schopenhauer for their considerable insights into the human mind, yet he also sought to distance the nascent science of psychoanalysis from what he referred to as the "speculative metaphysics" of philosophy. Freud hoped to ensure that psychoanalysis could claim the "objectivity" of the natural sciences, rather than be seen as a branch of the humanities. In our opinion, Freud thereby left the unfortunate legacy of an artificial distinction between the disciplines of psychoanalysis and philosophy. The falsity of this distinction is nowhere more apparent than in the current psychoanalytic study of intersubjectivity, a topic that is philosophical in origin and nature.

There is also another factor at work. Philosophy, as it is generally taught in Britain and North America, focuses on technical issues that are remote from the realities of psychoanalytic practice. In Europe, however, there is a tradition of "continental philosophy" that deals with questions that have greater relevance to clinical practice. Thus, continental philosophers might ask: How can we achieve insight into the way we live our lives? How can we understand the nature of human love and intimacy? What is the role of the body in my experience and perception of the world around me? How can we account for the multifaceted, often opposing tendencies of human interaction? And how is the "human being, or subject, situated in a world of shared understandings?"

Continental philosophers clearly reject the traditional conception of the subject as isolated and closed in on itself. In its place, they seek to formulate a conception of the subject and subjectivity that is true to our lived experience. Thus, they pay particular attention to prereflective and somatic experience, and consider the ways in which we are always and inevitably enmeshed in social contexts. Not by chance, we believe, contemporary interpersonal and relational psychoanalysts embrace these same revisions, broadening for inclusion in analysis experiences that were similarly excluded from classical consideration. Stern's (1997) ideas regarding "unformulated experience" are an investigation of the prereflective. Inclusion of bodily experiencing in subjective life is central to the work of a number of leading relationalists (Aron & Anderson, 1998).

In a larger sense, the entire project of relationality (Mitchell, 2000) is motivated by the optimism of encountering alterity in psychoanalysis; or, as Benjamin (1990) has succinctly stated, "Where objects were, there subjects might be."

For many psychoanalysts, however, one of the greatest impediments to the introduction of philosophy into psychoanalytic discourse continues to be the issue of how data are accumulated and assessed. Many psychoanalysts have a stereotyped conception of the philosopher as an isolated scholar who reflects only on his or her own experience in a process known as "introspection." This view is only partially correct. To
be sure, philosophers, like literary writers, often make acute observations of human experience. Over the course of the twentieth century, however, continental philosophers have also developed tools, such as the so-called phenomenological method, to observe and report their findings of the world around them—a process that ultimately gave rise to the field of phenomenological psychology. Phenomenology, in the broadest sense, refers to the description of phenomena as they appear, and has become a frequently used descriptive term in contemporary psychiatry. Not surprisingly, it is the work of phenomenologically influenced philosophers that has had a tremendous impact on the development of intersubjectivity as a topic of psychological relevance.

Thus, modern philosophy, like psychoanalysis, is varied in its approach and does not constitute a unified discipline. And like psychoanalysis, continental philosophy can be read as an endeavor to understand and articulate the meaning of human subjectivity. What constitutes subjective experience? Is subjectivity something that is internal and private or is it external and public? Do our subjectivities follow from or precede our interaction with other human beings? Is subjectivity always and inevitably a construction? What role do other people, language, and society play in the development of our subjectivities?

These questions have engaged philosophers since René Descartes posited his famous dictum "I think therefore I am" (cogito ergo sum) in the seventeenth century and ushered in the age of modern philosophy. Descartes sought to provide a foundation on which Enlightenment science and philosophy might be based. Using a process of systematic doubt, he concluded that it is precisely our ability to think that is foundational for experience and knowledge. According to Descartes, the beliefs, emotions, and other experiences that constitute our subjectivities are all attributable to our capacity for thought.

Descartes thus introduced a fundamental split between our minds—our ability to think—and all that exists outside of our minds. Indeed, Descartes' subject is a solitary individual, enclosed within the private space of his or her thoughts. The term "solipsism" is used to describe Descartes' conception of the mind because it remains isolated from the external world; not only are our minds supposedly divided from our bodies, we are also fundamentally separated from other human beings and the world around us.

The Cartesian paradigm of consciousness forms the ground of much modern philosophy. Following Descartes, self-consciousness is attributed to the cognitive model of reflection: the subject, so to speak, holds a mirror in front of itself, and by perceiving an image in the mirror, identifies itself as the beholder of this image. In a similar manner, modernity is seen as stemming from a model of the subject as "absolute." This implies that the world around us is perceived simply as a mirror of our subjectivities, with the result that everything is seen through its relation to our individual consciousness.

In an attempt to overcome the dilemmas of solipsism and the Cartesian paradigm of consciousness, philosophers since Descartes have sought to link human subjectivity, or self-consciousness, to our interactions with other human beings and the world around us. The concept of intersubjectivity was developed to explain the connections that exist between two individual subjects, and examine the way in which each communicates its subjectivity to the other.

While most philosophers of intersubjectivity agree on this basic principle, they are divided on whether subjectivity precedes or follows from encounter with the other. For some, individual subjectivity, or self-consciousness, is a precondition of intersubjectivity; for others, subjectivity is exclusively a product of the intersubjective field in which we exist. The following history of intersubjectivity is selective; we seek to show the way in which perspectives on subjectivity and intersubjectivity are necessarily interconnected. Our aim is to elaborate the work of those philosophers whose ideas we believe most distinctly contribute to the current psychoanalytic exploration of intersubjectivity. (For further discussion of the bridge between continental intersubjective philosophy and psychoanalysis see Crossley, 1996; Frie, 1997, 2000; Theunissen, 1977, 1984.)

A History of Intersubjectivity

The German philosopher F. H. Jacobi (1785) is one of the first in a chain of European thinkers to dispute Descartes' theory of mind from the perspective of intersubjectivity. In an effort to negate the primacy that Descartes grants to the "I" or thinking self, Jacobi suggests that the world precedes thought itself. For Jacobi, the precedence of our direct awareness of the world translates into the assertion that "without Thou, I is impossible." Thus he asserts that the Thou, or human other, exists in
the world before Descartes' solitary subject, and its existence must be considered as certain as my own. Jacobi's bold assertion casts doubt on the possibility of solipsistic existence.

The question of what constitutes subjectivity, or self-consciousness, is central to the work of J. G. Fichte and the early German Romantic philosophers, F. W. J. Schelling and Friedrich von Hardenberg. These thinkers elaborate a conception of individual self-consciousness that has direct consequences for how we think about the relation of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. It was Fichte (1795) who first demonstrated that the reflection model of self-consciousness is insufficient for explaining the knowledge we have of ourselves.

Fichte maintains that consciousness must be familiar with itself in some way prior to the act of reflecting on itself (Henrich, 1982). To use an everyday example: it is only possible for me to recognize my reflected image in a mirror, or in another person, if I am already familiar with myself on a prereflective level. This familiarity with myself is not a Cartesian essentialism. Rather, it is a rudimentary self-awareness that allows for my self-development in interaction with others. Without a prereflective self-awareness, there would be no way of knowing that my reflection is in fact my own consciousness. Fichte thus suggests that the solipsistic circle of reflection will only be overcome if a basic self-consciousness is already given in a spontaneous act. From this perspective, self-consciousness, or individual subjectivity, can never be understood to derive wholly from my encounter with another person. There is always some basic self-awareness that precedes the encounter and enables it to take place.

Fichte's argument stands in direct contrast to G. W. F. Hegel's elaboration of an intersubjective model of self-consciousness. Hegel is frequently seen as the precursor of psychoanalytic theories of intersubjectivity (Modell, 1993). His discussion of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) constitutes an initial stage in the dialectical movement toward the realization of absolute knowledge. In a chapter entitled "Lordship and Bondage," he describes the interrelationship between one's own consciousness of self and another person's consciousness of self. Consciousness of self, according to Hegel, can exist only when recognized by the other.

For Hegel, the process of recognition reveals the nature of human desire as each self strives to achieve acknowledgment by another self-consciousness. The self is mirrored in the other and the other is mirrored in the self, so that each requires the other to achieve recognition. This results in a mutual struggle for recognition that Hegel refers to as the master-slave dialectic: there can be no master without a slave, and no slave without a master. For Hegel, therefore, the other person provides the condition of possibility for self-consciousness—a fact, which he says, is illustrated by our common participation in the social world. Self and other always exist in a relationship of dependency, desire, and control, which is resolved only by means of mutual recognition.

The process of mutual recognition conceived by Hegel is eclipsed by the equiprimordiality of the self and other, or I and Thou, in the work of Ludwig Feuerbach (1843). Feuerbach was a critic of Hegel and argued that philosophy's primary objective should be the study of what it means to be human, not the nature of absolute knowledge. He argues that the essence of being human, our ability to think and make moral choices, can never be accounted for in the isolated individual. Rather, this essence is only evident in the community of one person with another—what he refers to as the fundamental relation between I and Thou. Feuerbach thus disputes Jocobi's notion that the Thou exists prior to the I. Instead, he establishes the basic precept of the "philosophy of dialogue," namely, the simultaneous reality of I and Thou as they exist in relation to one another.

The most prominent representative of the philosophy of dialogue is Martin Buber. His theory of I and Thou (1923) draws on the perspectives of Jacoby and Feuerbach and fundamentally rejects the notion of the isolated individual mind. According to Buber, the human being can never be fully understood apart from his or her relation with others. Each component of a relation, if considered on its own, is an abstraction. Individual subjectivity exists insofar as it swings between two types of social relation, the I-It and I-Thou. Each type of relation is determined by the nature of our dialogue. When I relate to the other as a Thou, a mutual relationship is initiated. When I relate to the other as an I, that person becomes an object who is used and experienced by me. For Buber, dialogue is not just a form of linguistic communication, but denotes the interhuman dimension generally.

A different approach to understanding the problem of intersubjectivity was proposed by Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology. He confronted the question of solipsism in his *Categorical Meditations* (1929). Husserl maintains that we account for the reality of another consciousness by means of an imaginative analogical transfer of our own experi-
ences onto others, not unlike the psychoanalytic reliance on empathy to understand the other. For Husserl, it is always my individual transcendental ego that conveys meaning onto objects in the world around me, including other people. His emphasis on the transcendental ego stands in marked contrast to Buber, who states that the relationship of I and Thou can never be reduced to the consciousness that either of them has of it. Seen from this perspective, Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity, and especially his concept of the transcendental ego, retains a strong monological bias.

Husserl's student, Martin Heidegger, sought to overcome the dilemmas of the transcendental ego in his chief work, Being and Time (1927). Heidegger's analysis is oriented toward an ontological end and asks, in essence, what is the meaning of Being? He refers to the person who questions Being as "Dasein." Heidegger argues that Dasein is neither autonomous nor self-contained, but must always be understood as situated in the world. Dasein exists as "being-in-the-world." Heidegger tells us that Dasein comes to be on the basis of its interactions with the world—a world that always includes others. He therefore refers to Dasein as "being-with-others," to indicate that others are always and already present in our world. We exist, communicate, and achieve self-awareness in a context of shared understandings with others.

The limitations of Husserl's transcendental ego and Heidegger's ontology form the basis for Emmanuel Levinas's (1961, 1974) elaboration of a theory of "the Other." For Levinas, both of these perspectives of Husserl and Heidegger neglect what he calls "otherwise than being," namely the ethical dimension of intersubjectivity. Levinas argues that an encounter with the Other can never be reduced to my schema of who the other person is. This would represent a reduction of the Other to "the Same," because the Other's irreducibility would be lost in my mental picture of him or her. When contact with the real Other is closed off, then a "totalization" of that person takes place and an act of violence is committed. On this basis, Levinas also rejects Buber's I-Thou relationship, finding it too familiar to be a genuine relation of otherness. According to Levinas, it is precisely the appearance of the Other in face-to-face encounter that calls into question the omnipotence of the ego or subject. To be a social subject is to be "for-the-other": responsible to, and for, the uniqueness of the Other.

The fact that we live in a world of shared understanding is integral to the work of so-called existential-phenomenological thinkers—Ludwig

Binswanger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty—each of whom elaborates a unique perspective on intersubjectivity. Binswanger stands out in the history of intersubjectivity because he was first and foremost a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. He develops a dialogical perspective on intersubjectivity in his main work, Basic Forms and Knowledge of Human Existence (1942), that was written in response to Heidegger's inadequate treatment of otherness. Binswanger rejects Heidegger's account of authentic existence because it does not sufficiently account for the role of the other in the achievement of self-understanding. He turns instead to Buber's theory of I and Thou and delineates different forms of social existence—singular, plural, and dual—all of which are oriented toward the achievement of loving dialogue with another person. For Binswanger, change and growth are made possible in a relationship based on mutuality, openness, and directness. He elaborates the dynamic character of self-other interaction in terms of a Hegelian dialectic of separateness and togetherness. It is this essential paradox, according to Binswanger, that provides for the possibility of a shared identity in which individual identity is not only sustained, but transformed and enhanced in relationship with the other.

Sartre's discussion of intersubjectivity in Being and Nothingness (1943) centers on the direct impact of the other on my experience. In contrast to Heidegger, Sartre reformulates the Cartesian cogito, rather than dismiss it altogether. In a manner akin to Pichte and the early German Romantic philosophers, Sartre develops a conception of prereflective self-consciousness that provides the basis for his perspective on otherness. Sartre also moves beyond Heidegger's ontology in that he examines the body and the nature of interaction in the concrete social sphere. Sartre develops a conflictual scheme in order to explain the way in which subjects interact. His dialectic of "the look" refers to my perception of the other as a threat to my freedom; I seek to recapture my freedom through subjugating the other. The dialectical nature of this interaction provides the basis for Sartre's discussion of sadism and masochism. He refers to the appropriation of the other, without letting oneself be appropriated in turn, as sadism. Conversely, the denial of one's subjectivity and the refusal to be anything but an object for the other constitutes masochism. The interpersonal love relationship is characterized by the oscillation of these two basic attitudes.

For Merleau-Ponty, intersubjectivity is a basic facet of human perception. In The Phenomenology of Perception (1945), he argues that we live
in and experience the world through our perceptual modalities, which are all grounded in the body. He thus rejects the notion of an isolated mind and, in its place, introduces the notion of a body-subject, a concept earlier developed by Binswanger (1935). For Merleau-Ponty, perception is not simply an experience of objects, but rather an involvement with the world on a prereflective level. All of our experiences and the meanings that animate our lives follow from our bodily involvement with the world. To exist as a body is to be inherently interactional. According to Merleau-Ponty, our actions interlock and orient us to one another, thus forming an intersubjective system. Like Buber, he insists that the intersubjective system that exists between body-subjects is not reducible to the consciousness that each individual has of it. In dialogue, Merleau-Ponty notes, the self and other form a common world and their individual perspectives blend in the context of a shared world.

Dialogue, and language generally, is the key medium of most social interactions. In much recent philosophy and literary theory, language is seen as a means to overcome the Cartesian paradigm of consciousness. To this end, current theorists of intersubjectivity in European philosophy and psychoanalysis have developed conceptions of subjectivity almost exclusively in terms of the subject’s relation to language (Frie, 1999a). Linguistic intersubjectivity is taken as a starting point, and subjectivity is construed in relation to it. The turn to language in recent theories of intersubjectivity therefore forms a challenge to earlier attempts that consider intersubjectivity chiefly in terms of perception, engagement, and interaction.

The most prominent representatives of this approach include critical theorist Jürgen Habermas and poststructuralist and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Drawing on G. H. Mead’s (1962) theory of symbolic interaction, Habermas (1981) seeks to demonstrate that our linguistic relations with others are constitutive of our subjectivities. Thus, he focuses chiefly on the relation of language and speech to intersubjectivity. Similarly, Lacan (1977) incorporates structuralist principles in his elaboration of the intersubjective domain of language, or the symbolic order. Although Lacan posits three registers of existence—the Real, imaginary, and symbolic—he maintains that the subject’s reality essentially is language. According to Lacan, the subject is radically decentered by its inception in the symbolic order. For Habermas and Lacan alike, therefore, intersubjectivity is essentially equated with language.

The history of intersubjectivity therefore provides a means to examine and explore the paradigm shift away from the Cartesian view of consciousness. For psychoanalysts, intersubjectivity has become a method by which to overcome the traditional Freudian focus on the internal workings of the mind. Once the self is understood to exist within an intersubjective field and to develop in a context of self-other interaction, then attempts to understand human behavior in terms of internal drives and conflict may appear one-sided.

Seen from this perspective, the paradigm shift in the work of intersubjective psychoanalysis mirrors the changes that have taken place in the philosophy of intersubjectivity. In the sections that follow, we examine and explore the way this paradigm shift has been elaborated in the work of Jessica Benjamin, Thomas Ogden, and Robert Stolorow and his colleagues. Where once the mind was seen as isolated from others and divided from the body, these theorists see subjectivity as developing and existing within an intersubjective and bodily context. Whereas Descartes viewed the mind and the external world as separate and opposed, Benjamin, Ogden, and Stolorow see individual subjectivity and intersubjectivity as inherently related. Our aim thus is to illustrate the ways in which each of these psychoanalysts elaborates the connections between subjectivity and intersubjectivity, and to demonstrate the parallels between the philosophy of intersubjectivity and their own formulations of this theme.

Jessica Benjamin: Developmental Intersubjectivity

Jessica Benjamin’s developmental perspective on intersubjectivity has its basis in infancy research, feminist thought, and continental philosophy. The Bonds of Love (1988) represents her first attempt to fully integrate these different approaches in a theory of intersubjectivity. Benjamin (1995) is critical of classical psychoanalytic theory, which sees human development in terms of a unilinear trajectory from oneness to separateness. Her aim is to “transcend the infantocentric viewpoint of intrapsychic theory” (p. 32). She criticizes much previous analytic theory for its treatment of the mother solely as an object, not as an individual in her own right, and elaborates an intersubjective scheme that stresses the importance of the infant’s recognition of the unique and separate qualities of the mother.

Benjamin credits Margaret Mahler’s (1975) separation-individuation model with bringing about a gradual shift to an object-relations approach in psychoanalysis. Yet she is also critical of Mahler’s notion that the infant
begins as a symbiosis with the mother from which it must differentiate itself. Benjamin turns instead to Daniel Stern (1985), who argues that the infant is never totally undifferentiated from the mother and has the innate capacity to engage the other. Stern demonstrates how crucial the relationship of mutual influence between the infant and mother is for early self-development. He designates the developmental phase from eight to nine months, when the infant becomes affectively attuned to the other, as intersubjectivity. Benjamin accepts this basic precept, but sees the development of intersubjectivity as an ongoing process that begins earlier in the infant's life.

Thus, Benjamin's perspective on human development has more obvious parallels with that of Stern than with Mahler. She does not reject one model in place of the other, however, preferring to see Mahler's separation-individuation theory and Stern's notion of intersubjective relatedness as complementary. According to Benjamin, the notions of separation and connection should not be seen simply as opposite endpoints of a longitudinal trajectory; rather, they form a tension that continues beyond the phase of affective attunement. And it is precisely this tension that constitutes the basis for her own elaboration of our intersubjective relatedness.

Benjamin draws on Winnicott's (1969) notion of destroying the object, because this makes possible the transition from relating and using the object intrapsychically to carrying on a relationship with an other who is objectively perceived as existing outside the self, an entity in her own right. The act of negating the object enables us to know that she is not just a mental product, but really does exist outside ourselves. Winnicott's work thus provides a means to conceptualize the way in which the real other can be integrated with the intrapsychic experience of the other. Appreciation of the other's reality allows for the establishment of shared—intersubjective—reality.

For Benjamin, the struggle for recognition characterizes the way in which we relate to the other person as an independent consciousness, someone who is like us, yet different. Implicit in this approach is her concern to show that the mother is a subject, not only an object. The mother is not simply an extension of the infant's developmental needs, but an agent with her own subjective emotions and desires. Translated into a model of intersubjective relatedness, this basic precept implies that the self and other are each subjects who seek to assert themselves. "From the standpoint of intersubjective theory, the ideal 'resolution' of the par-

adox of recognition is that it continue as a constant tension between recognizing the other and asserting the self" (Benjamin, 1995, p. 38).

The recognition of another person's mind as separate from one's own occurs through a paradoxical process of finding real other people (as opposed to mental objects) and coming to realize that one's own subjectivity is dependent on recognition by them. For Benjamin (1988), a generative tension is sustained through an individual's self-assertion of her own will and the mutual recognition of the other's will "that allows self and other to meet as sovereign equals" (p. 12).

On this basis, then, Benjamin's intersubjective concerns center around the process whereby individuals come to be known for who they truly are, and come to know another for who he or she truly is. Her purpose is not to reduce the self to its perceptions and experience of the other; rather, she seeks to maintain a vital contradiction, a tension by which a balance between the intrapsychic and intersubjective realms can be maintained.

Discussion

Benjamin's contributions on intersubjectivity rely more on theoretical argument and exegesis than on clinical case examples. Benjamin's emphasis on mutual recognition demonstrates that her philosophical base is in Hegel predominantly. Hegel, recognized as "the first intersubjective or relational psychologist" (Modell, 1993, p. 99), described the battle that two subjects engage in, in order that each may dominate the other. Benjamin's discussion of Hegel, like that of other psychoanalysts, is indebted to Alexandre Kojève's (1954–55) influential interpretations of Phenomenology of Spirit, which had a major impact on contemporary continental understandings of Hegel. Kojève emphasized the role of conflict and tension in the early stage of the dialectic, in which self-conscious emerges out of a cycle of desire and of the satisfaction of desire.

As described by Kojève, the Hegelian dialectic is a "life and death struggle" taken up by two subjects who would prefer the condition of solipsism to awareness that otherness exists in the world. The first experiential moment of intersubjectivity is one of rupture and disunity. According to this view, physical need leads human subjects into a fundamental dependence on external objects. This outward search for satisfaction results in a powerplay of dominance and submission as each seeks to ward
off the awareness of the other’s subjectivity. Recognition of the other occurs begrudgingly.

Benjamin further interprets Hegel through a Winnicottian reading. She suggests that Winnicott’s schema of transition from object relating to object usage parallels Hegel’s notion of one subject attempting to omnipotently obliterate the subjectivity of the other. In Winnicott, however, the survival of the other’s mental attacks results in the discovery of actual (external) otherness. Thus, a crucial difference for Benjamin (1999a) in the struggle for recognition is that “the pleasure of the other being able to exist outside our fantasized omnipotence is such that we may fairly say that we do want to recognize the reality of the other” (p. 396).

Benjamin’s account of intersubjectivity also has parallels to the philosophers of dialogue, or I and Thou, for whom the self can only be understood in terms of its relationship to others. It is Buber’s work, in particular, that constitutes the transition to a thorough-going intersubjective conception of the self. Yet Buber’s theory of I and Thou, with its conception of reciprocal interaction and togetherness, stands in stark contrast to the tension and conflict inherent in Hegel’s dialectic. Because Benjamin’s developmental intersubjectivity relies on these very aspects of Hegel, Buber’s work is presumably less relevant to her project. Indeed, references to the philosophy of dialogue are curiously absent. Binswanger’s (1942) application of Hegel and Buber to his theory of intersubjectivity considerably predates current preoccupation with these theorists and has been largely overlooked (Frie, 1997/2000). The parallels between his work and that of Benjamin are particularly evocative.

At the same time, Benjamin cites the work Habermas, whose ideas on intersubjectivity can be read as an extension of Buber’s. In a move that is puzzling to us, however, Benjamin (1988) actually locates the very origins of intersubjectivity in Habermas’s social theory (p. 19). Although current continental discussion of intersubjectivity owes much to the work of Habermas, the origins of the concept are much broader, as our discussion has shown. The relevance of Habermas’s to Benjamin’s developmental conception of intersubjectivity can be seen in his intriguing application of G. H. Mead’s theory of symbolic interaction to the philosophy of intersubjectivity. For Habermas and Mead alike, the fully self-conscious subject emerges through its symbolic interaction with others.

Benjamin currently uses the term intersubjectivity to refer specifically to the recognition of the other as “an equivalent center of being.” This appears to be a shift from her earlier Hegelian focus on problems of relating to the other as an independent consciousness. The term “equivalent center of being” would seem to suggest a parallel with the ethical intersubjectivity of Levinas.

Indeed, in addition to the much-recognized influence of Hegel on Benjamin’s work, the work of Levinas must also be accounted for in her psychoanalytic concerns. This is not entirely surprising, given that Levinas had an impact on Sartre’s philosophic ideas, and Benjamin draws considerably on the work of Simone de Beauvoir, Sartre’s longtime companion and colleague. De Beauvoir’s writings on the objectification of the other—the woman—became a cornerstone of contemporary feminism. Because Benjamin’s project is a plea for a measure of respect for difference, we see Levinas’s ethical demand that the other not be reduced to the same as consistent with her goals. Although Benjamin does emphasize the essential role of the negating aspect in the dialectic of recognition, we read her larger intent as Levinasian. Thus, Benjamin (1999b) states, “What psychoanalysis considers the problems of overcoming omnipotence is thus always linked to the ethical problem of respect and the political problem of nonviolence” (p. 94).

Benjamin (1999c) differentiates her current usage of “intersubjectivity” from that of Stolorow and his colleagues, “whose definition of intersubjectivity refers to all interplay between different subjective worlds. That definition does not tell us how the intersubjective differs from the interpersonal . . . nor does it sufficiently distinguish subjects from objects” (p. 201). Given their common reliance on a Hegelian philosophic base, Benjamin finds much in common with Ogden’s intersubjective conception. Ogden’s scheme of the recognizing and subjugating “third” bears close resemblance to Benjamin’s dialectical tension between recognition and negation. Additionally, Benjamin has more recently taken up differing conceptions of Ogden’s (1994) analytic third to elaborate on her own view that “the third appears only in the relationship of recognition, the space that mediates the two partner’s viewpoints, preventing collapse of tension” (Benjamin, 1999c, p. 204).

Benjamin continues to hold to a position where subjectivity is considered an achievement of social interaction in infancy. If she adopts the hard form of this stance, and does not allow for varying forms of subjective experience to predetermine the achievement through recognition, then problems would arise in the ability of the subject to know it was she who was being recognized. As Fichte demonstrated in his critique of
the reflection model of self-consciousness, without a prereflective self-awareness, there would be no way of knowing that my reflection is in fact my own consciousness. Benjamin speaks of earlier "presubjective" states, before the infant recognizes the other as a separate being. And her discussion of these states is crucial in order to avoid the circularity of the reflection model of self-consciousness. It is not, however, as well integrated into her larger scheme of intersubjective recognition as it might be. As Stern’s (1985) research has shown, months before the infant is aware of other minds, she can already differentiate her own body from those of others. This bodily based understanding of difference in the context of similarity—"we are both embodied"—occurs well before what Benjamin considers to be intersubjectivity proper. It seems to us that the latter is contingent on the former; it is not merely a developmental milestone to recognition. Indeed, we believe the very notion of recognition can be reconceptualized as a bodily based interaction between what Merleau-Ponty (1968) refers to as "incarnated minds."

Thomas Ogden: Continuous Creation

Having been highly influenced by the British school of object relations, Thomas Ogden’s approach to intersubjectivity incorporates the work of Klein, Bion, and Winnicott. These authors’ ideas on the importance of illusion and play, separateness and oneness, fantasy and dream space are woven into Ogden’s intersubjective conceptions. Additionally, their focus on preoedipal mental states has been highly formative for Ogden’s intersubjective model. Much of Ogden’s focus has been an experience-near attempt to capture what it is like to live in different states of mind. In his reconceptualization of Kleinian paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions as “modes of organizing and processing experience” (Ogden, 1986, p. 52), his focus is on the distinctive “quality(ies) of being” generated by each position. As such, Ogden, probably more than any other contemporary intersubjectivist theorist, has been concerned with the vicissitudes of human experiencing.

Ogden (1986) began exploring the topic of presubjective experience in his Matrix of the Mind. There he elucidated the sense of self-as-object present in the paranoid-schizoid position, and the development of self-reflexivity during the depressive position. In later work, Ogden (1994, 1997) challenged the idea of excluding realms of somatic and prereflec-

tive experiencing from a consideration of subjective experiencing. He introduced a third pole to the Kleinian scheme, the autistic-contiguous position, which he described as a prereflective (“presymbolic”) and perceptually based (“sensory dominated”) form of subjectivity. It is a mode of generating feeling occurring as “protosymbolic impressions of sensory experience . . . rhythmicity and experiences of sensory contiguity (especially at the skin surface) that contribute to an elemental sense of continuity of being over time” (Ogden, 1994, p. 36). In his return to the lived body, Ogden directs the analyst’s attention to the flow of his somatic experiencing and prereflective reveries in order to reclaim connection to already existing levels of intersubjective engagement.

Ogden’s conception of the subject is largely Winnicottian. He appears to approach the subject as paradoxically preexisting (prior to relational involvement) as well as created (within the infant-mother–analyst-analysand matrix). Eschewing the difference between reality and fantasy, separateness and at-oneness, he relocates the analytic subject in Winnicott’s “third area of experiencing,” between these poles. Ogden (1997) has extended this idea through his clinical conception of the “intersubjective analytic third.” “I view the intersubjective analytic third as a third subject created by the unconscious interplay of analyst and analysand; at the same time, the analyst and analysand qua analyst and analysand are generated in the act of creating the analytic third” (p. 30).

If the key issue for Benjamin’s intersubjective theory is recognition, then one might say that the key issue for Ogden’s theory is creation. What is created intersubjectively between analysand and analyst is a process that not only represents the intersection of two individual subjectivities that have come together, but a process that comes to define analysand and analyst as subjects. This intersubjective conception is all about process, and it is a process from which nothing is exempted, not the analyst’s thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, emotions, or very personal reveries.

The decentering of subjectivity that Ogden (1997) describes involves giving over one’s separate individuality to a third subject, that is neither analyst nor analysand but a third subjectivity unconsciously generated by the analytic pair . . . it represents an emotionally draining undertaking in which analyst and analysand each to a degree “loses his mind” (his capacity to think and create experience as a distinctly separate individual). [p. 9]
Thinking in this way makes it harder to determine with certainty where the patient leaves off and the analyst begins. But Ogden is not advocating for merger experiences so much as for intensely personal, and simultaneously, intensely interactive meetings with other people. He uses the dreamlike state of reverie to create and access somatic, prereflexive experiences of the analyst as they are generated in the context of the specific analytic pair. In this way, he believes the analyst may gain access to levels of the patient's experiencing that are not available through rational exchange of knowledge from one to the other. Ogden (1995), however, does not advocate for self-disclosure of the analyst's experiences within the third. Rather, he attempts to maintain the dialectic of privacy and communication between analyst and analysand by using these experiences "implicitly," speaking "from" the experience he has just had, rather than about that experience.

Discussion

In Europe, where traditionally there has been less division between philosophy and psychoanalysis, productive cross-fertilization of thought predated what is just beginning to occur in America. Ogden1 draws influence from the British school and other European psychoanalytic sources.2 The building blocks of his intersubjective analytic theory are thus to some extent molded by Continental philosophic concerns. Among the philosophic influences cited by Ogden in his work are Hegel, Sartre, and Habermas. Hegel is made great use of, as we will illustrate; Sartre is used to illuminate the experience of primitive mental states; and, as in the case of Benjamin's work, Habermas is relegated to passing citation.

Ogden's intersubjective conception parallels Benjamin's in his adoption of the Hegelian dialectic and emphasis (in his earlier work) on self-consciousness. A dialectic, as defined by Ogden (1986, p. 208), "is a process in which each of two opposing concepts creates, informs, preserves, and negates the other, each standing in a dynamic (ever-changing) relationship with the other (Hegel, 1807; Kojève, 1934–35). The dialectical process moves towards integration, but integration is never complete. Each integration creates a new dialectical opposition and a new dynamic tension." Applying the concept of the dialectic to psychoanalytic cannon, Ogden restituated, in a creatively fresh way, the tension between such concepts as conscious and unconscious; paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions; and at-one-ness and separateness. Through the use of the dialectic, Ogden has illustrated how these concepts can never stand separately from one another, and how their relationship to each other creates and defines each of the terms. In a related manner, Ogden drew on the Hegelian struggle for recognition to describe the dialectical process of recognition and negation (subjugation) occurring during analysis.

Parallels to existential and phenomenological thinkers are particularly evident in Ogden's work. For instance, in discussing "modes of being" within the paranoid-schizoid position, Ogden (1986) parallels experience prior to the formation of a subjective sense of "I" with Sartre's (1943) notion of being-in-itself. Both are seen as nonreflective states where experience "simply is what it is," without interpretation, judgment, or reflective self-consciousness. Ogden's consistent concern with ontological issues has shaped his reconceptualization of traditional analytic concepts. The aforementioned example of revising Kleinian positions to reflect the "qualities of being" generated by each illustrates Ogden's focus on the phenomenology of experiencing. One may even say that for Ogden, à la Binswanger, pathology could be regarded as disturbances in being.

The concept of the intersubjective analytic third provides a framework for approaching the interdependence of subject and object similar to the Hegelian interdependence described earlier by Benjamin. Ogden's notion of the third also bears close resemblance to Buber's description of a mysterious force or "presence" he termed the "between." It is when we engage with the other in an I-Thou relationship, according to Buber (1923), that the experience of being a self arises: "Spirit is not in the I but between I and Thou" (p. 89). Different, however, is Ogden's inclusion of experiences in the intersubjective analytic third, which Buber would most certainly consider I-It forms of relatedness. For Ogden, the third may assume many shapes, including subjugating or compulsively perverse. It is interesting to note that both Ogden and Buber leave ambiguous (i.e., paradoxical) whether relationship precedes and gives rise to subjective experience, or whether the subject preexists, prior to the experience of relationship. It may well be that this ambiguity is intentional and essentially constitutive of transitional relatedness with the third, or the "between." Winnicott (1951) emphasized the role of indeterminacy in a similar vein.

The parallels between the perspectives developed by Ogden and Buber provide a basis for critical reflection on how we formulate the intersubjective relationship. On the basis of their respective notions of
the "third" and the "between," Ogden and Buber both seem to rely on an impressionistic view of what constitutes interpersonal relating. For each, the human relationship is difficult to grasp and formulate conceptually because it exists in a state of flowing and disappearing actions. The "third" and the "between" can similarly be understood as supporting the idea of continuous creation in the relational field. It is, however, this very impressionistic nature of this idea that leads to difficulties in the way each of these theorists attempts to explain the connections of the individual subject to the relationship. Clearly, when two subjects relate to one another, a new whole is formed that encompasses each of them. Yet the existence of ongoing creation within the relationship is dependent on the fact that at the center of the relation is the self-consciousness of the respective partners. And it is the notion of individual self-consciousness that is neglected by Buber and many other theorists of intersubjectivity (Frie, 1999b).

For quite a long time the analytic epiphany of psychic development has been self-reflection and the ability to think symbolically. Within philosophy, thinking has a long tradition of being considered the God-given defining characteristic of being human. Analytic developmental notions have also been shaped by this influence (e.g., Klein, 1975), so that self-reflexive consciousness has been equated with the attainment of human subjectivity, while prereflective, prelinguistic, and bodily sensibility was relegated to an animalistic and mystery and primitiveness. Ogden's focus on body-based subjective experience and his regular use of somatic experiences in the analytic encounter is unique among intersubjective writers and clinicians. Ogden's analytic approach to his own subjective experiences that are not thoughts (e.g., the somatic delusions he describes experiencing in the course of one treatment) parallels the importance Merleau-Ponty (1945, 1968) gave to the perceiving, prereflective body-subject. For psychoanalytic practice this is a tremendous shift. The inclusion of the analyst's visceral experience, of his daydreams and intuition, opens the door to whole realms of preconscious experience that has long been excluded from the purview of analytic examination (Reis, 1999a). This emphasis holds great importance for an intersubjective model. Foremost, it does not situate the analyst's subjectivity in some removed, objectivist position, where he can step back to gain a complete picture of reality. Instead, the analyst speaks of the world from a position (a "carnal" location, Merleau-Ponty would say) within the world. Ogden (1989) writes:

The analyst has no means of understanding the patient except through his or her own emotionally colored perceptions of and responses to the patient. Of these perceptions and responses, only a small proportion are conscious, and it is therefore imperative that the analyst learn to detect, read, and make use of his own shifting unconscious state as it unfolds in the analytic discourse. [p. 16]

For Merleau-Ponty (1945), the body-subject was not a transcendental experience of objects. In perceiving, the body participates in the world and in others, enjoining and opening onto an experience from which it is not separate, in the sense of a removed cogito. My body is my presence in the world and my insertion in a communion with otherness. In this sense, then, we can speak of Ogden's use of prereflective and bodily experience as a milieu, or a medium for the appearance of the world from which he is not separated (Reis, 1999a). This analyst's use of these phenomena to create understandings of the analysand's unconscious and not yet fully formed experience bespeaks an intensive involvement on the part of the analyst, going far beyond any kind of analytic "receptivity."

Given increased appreciation by psychoanalysts for the inherence of the analyst's subjective involvement, we may question Ogden's position of nondisclosure of countertransference experience. Timing of the analyst's intervention, in addition to the words he chooses and his tone of voice (and of course, content) all convey more disclosive information than the analyst may be aware of or intend. As Heidegger (1927) suggests, we always exist in a world that shapes our thoughts and actions—we can never separate ourselves from the world around us. Thus, Ogden's attempt to speak "from" the countertransference, but not directly about the countertransference, might reflect the analyst's wish to absent his experience more than is actually possible. This may be an unintended consequence of the dialectical approach adopted by Ogden, as even modes of privacy are conditioned by communicative dialectics.

In addition to the above themes, Ogden's work has continued to transform in new directions, as it is layered with textures of the writing of Borges, Frost, and Eliot. His recent exploration of intersubjective worlds in poetry and literature reflects an ongoing focus on phenomenological experiencing and communication of that experience to others. Ogden's use of poetry and literature as a method of explicating the multifaceted nature of intersubjective experience draws on a long tradition in conti-
ental theory and philosophy. Heidegger, for example, drew on the poetry of Hölderlin and others in the belief that the poets, with their evocative use of language, are best able to capture the nature of being. It was left to Binswanger (1942) to apply this insight to the study of intersubjectivity. He actively used a wide range of literary writing, from Shakespeare and Goethe to twentieth-century French poetry, in order to elaborate and explore presymbolic and nonverbal forms of relating. Finally, it was Sartre (1944), known as much for his plays and novels as for his philosophical writing, who wrote famously of a conflictual model of intersubjective relating.

Robert Stolorow et al.: Intersubjectivity Theory

It is the work of Robert Stolorow, George Atwood, Donna Orange, and Bernard Brandchaft that is probably most often identified with intersubjectivity in psychoanalysis. Indeed, it was largely through their efforts that the concept of intersubjectivity was introduced to the American psychoanalytic field. Since the late 1970s, Stolorow and his colleagues have developed what they call “intersubjectivity theory” in various stages (Stolorow & Atwood, 1979; Atwood & Stolorow, 1984; Stolorow, Brandchaft & Atwood, 1987; Stolorow & Atwood, 1992; Orange, Atwood & Stolorow, 1997). As their ideas have become more nuanced and defined, these authors have sought to distinguish their theory from the work of others (Stolorow, Orange & Atwood, 1999; Stolorow & Orange, 1999). For Stolorow and his colleagues, all intersubjective approaches are not alike (Stolorow & Orange, 1999; Stolorow, Orange & Atwood, 1999).

Intersubjectivity theory developed out of research undertaken by Stolorow and Atwood into the subjective origins of personality theories. Intersubjectivity theory seeks to comprehend psychological phenomena as forming at the interface of reciprocally interacting subjectivities, not as products of isolated intrapsychic mechanisms. As such, its implications are both theoretical and clinical. Intersubjectivity theory is closely aligned with Kohut’s self psychology because it accepts that the sources of psychoanalytic inquiry and understanding, as well as self-experience, are all radically context-dependent. In contrast to Kohut, however, intersubjectivity theory is critical of the notion of a preexisting nuclear self. And by emphasizing the development and maintenance of the organization of experience, intersubjectivity theory asserts that all selfhood develops and is maintained within the interplay between subjectivities.

For Stolorow and his colleagues, clinical work involves and takes place in the field formed by the interplay of two subjective worlds. Thus, intersubjectivity theory, like its relational and interpersonal counterparts, denies the validity of analytic neutrality. The myth of neutrality is seen as the outgrowth of an objectivist epistemology that envisions the mind in isolation, separated from the external reality that it perceives. The authors refer to this concept as the “myth of the isolated mind” (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992, p. 7). They suggest, in its place, the notion of “empathic-introspective inquiry” that seeks to account for the analyst’s impact on the patient’s experience. Thus,

Analytic and patient form an indissoluble psychological system, and that neither can, without violence to the integrity of the analytic experience, be studied alone. The organizing activities of both participants in any psychoanalytic process are crucial to understanding the impasses and meanings that develop in a specific intersubjective field. [Orange, Atwood & Stolorow, 1997]

It is precisely the specific intersubjective field that for Stolorow and colleagues is always context-dependent. Indeed, just as the interaction between analyst and patient occurs in a specific field and is embedded in a constitutive process, so too is self-experience a product of the contexts in which it develops and exists.

The emphasis on contextualism in their recent work (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992; Orange, Atwood & Stolorow, 1997) has provided the authors with a theoretical base from which to examine and elaborate the interaction of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. With the rejection of the objectivist epistemology of classical psychoanalysis, one-person psychology is ostensibly made obsolete. Stolorow and his colleagues go a step further, however, in also rejecting the so-called two-person psychology, which they believe continues to embody the notion of isolated and separate minds. Instead, they suggest the term “contextual psychology,” which accounts for the constitutive role of relatedness in the making of all experience (Orange, Atwood & Stolorow, 1997). According to this viewpoint, the individual and his or her intrapsychic world are included as a subsystem within a more encompassing relational or intersubjective suprasystem. As Stolorow and Atwood (1992) state,

The concept of an intersubjective system brings to focus both the individual’s world of inner experience and its embeddedness with other such
worlds in a continual flow of reciprocal mutual influence. In this vision, the gap between the intrapsychic and interpersonal realms is closed, and, indeed, the old dichotomy between them is rendered obsolete. [p. 18]

It is precisely this far-reaching attempt to undercut traditional distinctions that accounts for the radicality of intersubjectivity theory. But, as we shall see, it also raises important questions about its theoretical premises.

Discussion

For Stolorow and colleagues, as we have seen, intersubjectivity can exist between any two people as subjects. As a result, it does not refer primarily to a developmental achievement. They distinguish their conception from the work of Stern and Benjamin, for whom intersubjectivity is, at least in part, a developmental achievement or process. Similarly, Stolorow and colleagues draw a distinction between their work and interpersonalism. They argue that Sullivan's conception of "participant observation" implies that the analyst must maintain an external perspective that may ultimately interfere with the interaction of the patient. However, the question can also be raised whether they actually succeed in achieving their stated aim to overcome Cartesianism. Their concept of empathic-introspective inquiry, for example, implies an ability to empathize with a separate concrete reality, an other. Recognition that the patient is more than the analyst's knowledge of him or her suggests the existence of the other as a separate agent (Reis, 1999a). For this reason, empathic-introspective inquiry would seem to rely on the same external perspective as Sullivan's participant observation.

Although the work of Stolorow and his colleagues has numerous similarities with relational and interpersonal theory, it is the thorough-going emphasis on contextualism that probably sets it apart from these perspectives. In developing their contextualist intersubjective approach, the authors credit numerous philosophers, including Hegel, Husserl, Gadamer, Bakhtin, and Wittgenstein. They also account for a number of different sources, including Gestalt theory, Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, and Tomkins's ideas on the psychology of knowledge. Clearly, given the variety of sources they cite, their theory is complex and not easily defined or reduced to a single set of concepts. Nevertheless, it is possible to point to significant theoretical and historical parallels, and, in addition to the various sources they list, we think it is important to look to the work of several other thinkers.

As we have seen from our discussion of Benjamin and Ogden, Hegel's impact on the development of intersubjectivity theory cannot be underestimated. The general Hegelian notion of the interaction of self and other is taken up and expanded upon by Stolorow and colleagues. Yet the notions of conflict, tension, and the dialectic itself are deemphasized. In contrast to Stern and Benjamin, they move beyond the conception of mutual recognition. For them it continues to imply an atomistic thinking and fails to account for the overarching systemic importance of intersubjectivity. In its place, they propose a contextualist perspective according to which the subject and self is always and already inherent in an intersubjective field. In order to achieve the transition to contextualism, they rely on a "phenomenological" account of the self and its organizing principles. In contrast to Husserl, their aim is to elaborate and draw attention to the way in which our perception and self-experience is always and invariably embedded. Husserl's transcendent ego is rejected and, in its place, we find a new, thoroughly contextualized notion of subjectivity. Whether such a concept of subjectivity can remain in the purview of phenomenology is something we consider later.

In arguing that nothing can be known or experienced apart from the context in which it appears, Stolorow and colleagues credit the work of Gestalt psychology and point to Gadamer's hermeneutics as the source for understanding the fabric of our preconceptions. By drawing on Gadamer, they suggest that it is the historical matrix in which we are embedded that provides the ground for all interpretation and understanding. Gadamer's hermeneutics owe much to his teacher, Heidegger, and it is the latter's importance for contextualism that must also be acknowledged. Although the relevance of Heidegger's philosophy is considered early on (Atwood & Stolorow, 1984), the connections between his concept of being-in-the-world and a contextualist perspective on understanding are not elaborated. Following Heidegger, we exist in a world of historical and temporal contexts that will always determine the way in which we understand ourselves and others. In like fashion, Orange, Atwood, and Stolorow (1997) argue that the intersubjective psychoanalyst is always embedded in a "constitutive process," which combines history and temporality; "ontologically we regard the past and the future as inevitably implicated in all present moments" (p. 97).

On this basis, then, understanding becomes thoroughly contextual-
ized. As a result, the concept of the subject that exists within this contextualized, intersubjective field could hardly be more different than the Cartesian theory of mind that forms the basis of objectivist epistemologies. In place of Descartes’ autonomous, unified subject, they present the notion of the subject as a set of “organizing principles.” And in contrast to the “reifications” of traditional self-psychological formulations, they argue that “all selfhood—including enduring patterns of personality and pathology—develops and is maintained within, and as a function of, the interplay between subjectivities” (p. 6).

The authors thus seek to maintain a conception of subjectivity, however minimal. This position stands in marked contrast with much postmodern philosophy, which rejects any notion of subjectivity as a Cartesian artifact. Therefore, for many postmodernists, the very term “intersubjectivity” necessarily retains its Cartesian origins (Frie, 2000). Nor do they embrace the linguistic turn of much recent intersubjective philosophy. In contrast to the linguistic theory of the subject developed by Habermas, for instance, they emphasize the presymbolic nature of subjective experience, though in our opinion its clinical implications are yet to be fully explored. Seen from this perspective, we might say that they seek to decenter and rewrite the subject, rather than reject it altogether. The way in which they carry out this reformulation, however, is not unproblematic.

To begin with, they describe their approach as phenomenological, yet seek to distance themselves from Husserl. Indeed, throughout their work, Stolorow and colleagues acknowledge the role played by phenomenology in the development of their intersubjectivity theory. Phenomenology is chiefly concerned with the nature of experience and asks, in essence, what does it mean to experience something? In order to begin to answer this question, there needs to be a conception of the subject, or agent, for whom “experiencing” takes-place (Thompson, 2000). This raises the question, whether the subject, conceived of as a “set of organizing principles,” sufficiently describes the way in which we can be the organizers of our own experiences. The subjective experience with which the authors are concerned does not sufficiently include the agency of the subject. And indeed, human subjectivity is only possible if there is an agent for whom it exists. In other words, there needs to be a subject to organize, articulate, reflect, and act on its subjective experience.

Another question is whether their embrace of contextualism actually allows for a conception of the subject. For instance, can the subject be viewed as the locus of experience at the same time that it is seen as always and inevitably embedded in multiple intersubjective contexts? And does contextualism actually mesh with a theory of the subject as the organizer of experience? It seems to us that they want to have it both ways: they seek to overcome an objectivist epistemology through their embrace of contextualism, yet also want to retain a conception of the subject that their approach implicitly rejects as Cartesian.

Ultimately, the questions we have raised suggest that rather than solve old dichotomies and philosophical conundrums, the authors have to some extent subsumed them in their intersubjective theory. In our view, this is a consequence of the radicality of their conception of intersubjectivity. Their stated objective is to create a metatheory—an intersubjective suprasystem, if you will—that overcomes traditional differences between one- and two-person psychologies and renders obsolete the distinction between intrapsychic and interpersonal experience. This is far reaching indeed. Whereas intrapsychic theory begins with internalized drives and interpersonal theory begins with relationships, intersubjectivity theory seeks to account for both the subjective and intersubjective realms simultaneously. For Stolorow and colleagues, any attempt to distinguish between them constitutes a reification of Cartesian dualism. But herein lies the problem. The traditional distinctions between intrapsychic and interpersonal, private and public, internal and external remain an important and vital part of our psychoanalytic vocabulary, and as much recent scholarship and debate suggests, they are not easily rewritten.

Conclusion

Jessica Benjamin, Thomas Ogden, and Robert Stolorow have all engaged the continental tradition. In the spirit of intersubjective exchange they do not attempt to assimilate the richness of phenomenological philosophy into psychoanalytic cannon as an earlier generation had tried to craft (e.g., Loewald). Rather, they transform it as they deliberately widen the scope of the analytic conversation. Their efforts are largely behind our relatively new concern with others, rather than objects. Where object relations failed to include dimensions of difference, intersubjective theory is all about alterity and serves as the theoretical grounding for analytic studies of race and of gender.

This emphasis on difference is important to recent psychoanalytic theorizing. Unlike reductionist forms of postmodernism, intersubjective theory decents, but does not reject the subject altogether. In ways that are
often innovative and creative, Benjamin, Ogden, and Stolorow each seek to retain the individual differences of our subjectivities. In achieving this goal, however, their conceptions of the human subject are often underdeveloped and at times fractious. We have argued that the place of the subject, as an agent and the locus of our experience, needs to be retained in the formulation of intersubjectivity. It is precisely the ability to act on our individual, unique subjective experience that permits us to affect the relational and sociopolitical contexts in which we are embedded. By combining insights from philosophers as varied as Fichte, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas, we believe it is possible to "reconstruct" a post-Cartesian, embodied subject. Concepts such as prerreflexive self-consciousness, the body-subject, and the irreducible Other are all integral to this project. As the relativistic pitfalls of the postmodernist turn suggest, it is necessary to account for the way we maintain a sense of cohesion and identity as we engage and even change the intersubjective field in which we exist.

This task is made easier by the fact that intersubjectivity provides a new language for understanding forms of interaction that psychoanalysis has traditionally excluded from examination. It provides a means for thinking clinically about how the analyst's and the patient's inner experience is organized in the interactive context of the treatment. Intersubjectivity broadens for inclusion the analyst's subjective bodily states, reveries, and historical experiences in a way that does not reductively treat these as countertransference phenomena. For the intersubjectivist, the subjectivity of the analyst is not just "in the room" with the patient's, it is in the world with the patient, as an irreducible other for whom considerations of recognition, ethics, dialogue, history, mutual influence, and creation are always already either being attended to or not.

Our comparative look at three psychoanalyst's work is far from comprehensive, given the number of contemporary analysts writing and working in this area. The contributions of Jacobs (1991), Renik (1993), Ehrenberg (1992), Aron (1995), and others provide equal complexity and are due for comparative evaluation. Yet even within the work of each intersubjectivist we reviewed, the reader will appreciate the sometimes radical development of theory occasioned by a philosophic influence. Our concern has not been with the hobgoblin of consistency, but with illustrating the organic properties of these systems of thought, as they are currently developing. For us, the real excitement about intersubjective psychoanalytic theory is in the effect that philosophy, poetry, nonlinear


