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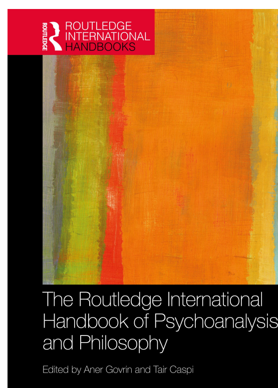

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Fairbairn's "Psychology of Dynamic Structure" and Philosophy

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11

FAIRBAIRN'S "PSYCHOLOGY OF DYNAMIC STRUCTURE" AND PHILOSOPHY

Graham S. Clarke

Timely Meditation

It is inconceivable that my approach to this topic should not reflect in some way the circumstances during which it was written, by which I mean the coronavirus pandemic. The original aspect of Fairbairn's contribution lies in his recognition of, and insistence upon, the crucial importance of relationships and interdependencies for human beings. Consequently, his theory is more topical now than it ever was, since the dominance of neoliberalism, originated by Thatcher and Reagan – "there is no such thing as society" – leading to the enforced production of entrepreneurial selves (Foucault), has proven to be a manifest and deadly backwater in the face of a global pandemic and climate crisis, and antithetical to a global future, in which we all might thrive, in a flourishing biosphere.

Background

Fairbairn collected his most important papers together in a book, *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality* (1952), including the crucially significant set of papers in which his original theory was developed, written during and around the Second World War and published in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. Fairbairn went on to produce a detailed application of his model to hysterical states (1954) and the consequences of his model for an understanding of the nature and aims of therapy (1958), from which his view of science is drawn. He also produced a number of synopses of his psychoanalytic theory of personality, or "psychology of dynamic structure", as he came to call it (1944, 1946, 1949, 1951a, 1954, 1955, 1963) earlier work towards which can be found in Birtles and Scharff (1994).

Fairbairn's model and thinking are rooted in Scottish thinking about personality and psychoanalysis, in part influenced by the lively debates during the late 19th and early 20th centuries between the absolute idealists and the personal idealists of the day (Mander, 2005) and earlier by approaches to the social during the Scottish Enlightenment (Clarke, 2008a). I have looked closely at Fairbairn's relationship with Macmurray (Clarke, 2006), Suttie (Clarke, 2011) and Glover (Clarke, 2018), and at a Fairbairnian explanation of DID/MPD (Finnegan and Clarke, 2014). I think that his turn towards a model-based form of explanation of psychoanalytic thinking (Fairbairn, 1944) may well have been influenced by Craik's introduction of mental models (Craik, 1943). Craik's work was later used by Bowlby to motivate the introduction of "internal working models of mother" into Bowlby's theory of attachment. These models and the ways

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they are internalised and dynamically interact are consistent with Fairbairn's own earlier description of them (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internal_working_model_of_attachment).

There is a different provenance for Fairbairn's model, which has been explored, in part at least, by those scholars interested in identifying religious influences on his thinking (Kirkwood, 2012; Hoffmann, 2014; Symington, 2014) purporting to show the degree to which the whole of his theory was grounded in religion. The fundamental importance of relationships to Fairbairn's theory is the main support for this claim. But, the fact that we come to be who we are and continue to flourish, or not, among a community of others through our relationships with them, is not exclusively Christian and might be more generally described as our social nature and circumstances. Fairbairn did write about social groups and did think that his theory was applicable to groups (Fairbairn, 1935).[1]

Fairbairn's Model of Endopsychic Structure and His Psychology of Dynamic Structure

Fairbairn's own hopes, expressed at the end of his part I, chapter 5 on *Object Relationships and Dynamic Structures* (Fairbairn, 1952) are that his efforts will afford "some indication . . . of the process whereby a psychology of dynamic structure has developed out of a psychology of object-relationships" (ibid., p. 151). The following outline in my own words is closely based upon my understanding of his model as it is described in his various synopses.

1. We all start with a *pristine bodily self*, libidinally oriented towards a world which we trust to satisfy our needs.
2. We soon learn that there are unsatisfactory aspects to our relationship with the world and start to internalise our relations with our original object (pre-ambivalent) as a form of defence.
3. As we grow and develop teeth, we become ambivalent and can discriminate between those relationships that are satisfactory and those that are unsatisfactory, and we now differentiate them into good and bad relationships and internalise them as such.
4. To be able to control our responses to the world we differentiate between those relationships that are too exciting and those that are too rejecting and separate them off from those that are acceptable.
5. Different sets of object relationships form different structures – a *central self* from the acceptable relationships, a *libidinal self* from the too-exciting relationships and an *antilibidinal self* from the too-rejecting relationships.
6. We idealise some of the acceptable object relationships to form an *ideal self* which, along with the central self, we use to control the subsidiary libidinal and antilibidinal selves as they are activated by our experiences and their internal dynamics.
7. As we develop and experience more of the world, and our relationships with others become more complex, we don't just continue to internalise relationships with others into the central libidinal and antilibidinal selves but, using the *moral defence* we are able to bolster the ideal self by internalising good aspects of significant others' behaviour.
8. By the time we are expected to choose a gendered identity, our experience of our mothers and fathers, or male and female significant others, is sufficiently developed to have coloured our choices, and we decide for ourselves who we will identify with or in opposition to.
9. During the developmental process, some of the object relationships that we internalised and made important in our internal world will have turned out to be poor or unnecessary choices that we want to modify. At this time, what Fairbairn calls the *transitional techniques*, the equivalent in many ways to the neuroses – *hysteria, obsession, phobia* and *paranoia* – are brought into play defensively to alter the ways that we relate to and use objects.
10. In Fairbairn's account of the development of the personality, the final goal is that of *mature dependence*. This is achieved when all the repressed aspects of the endopsychic structure – the

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unconscious libidinal and antilibidinal selves – have been worked through and there are only *preconscious* libidinal, antilibidinal and ideal selves available.

11 This working through of the subsidiary unconscious libidinal and antilibidinal selves and their transformation into preconscious libidinal and antilibidinal selves has important consequences for the ideal and central selves, which grow at the expense of the subsidiary selves.

12 Consequently, the ideal self will become more realistic depending upon the experience of the person, and the central self will behave realistically within that person's world view.

13 In contrast to the *initial pristine self*, with its ignorance of the world and its libidinal orientation, the *maturely dependent self* will be deeply knowledgeable of the world and capable of working positively and realistically within it. It will have control of its emotional responses to the world, which will be loving and giving whilst recognising the fundamental nature of aggression and the need for its being channeled productively.

14 A personality that is initially unitary but essentially needy, ignorant and vulnerable, becomes over time, through its relations with others in a social setting, an integrated personality that is worldly and loving. It takes the world in, learns from it and acts upon and/or within it, and in so doing transforms itself into a positive and unselfish contributor to the general good.

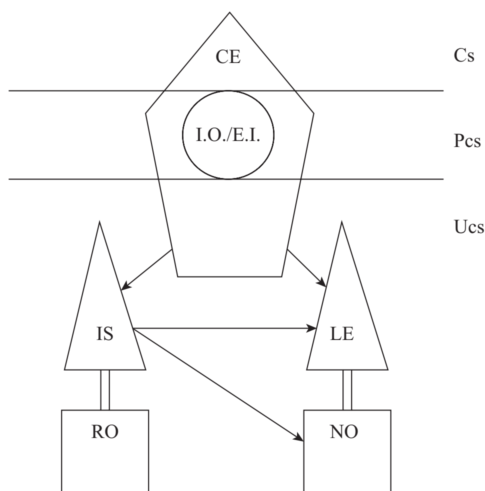

Figure 11.1 Based on Fairbairn's original 1944 diagram

The labels for the different dynamic endopsychic structures were later modified. In his 1954 paper on Hysterical States, Fairbairn introduces the Antilibidinal Ego and Object, and in the 1963 synopsis of his theory he uses the following:

In the Unconscious (Ucs) part of the mind:
The Internal Saboteur (IS) became the Antilibidinal Ego.
The Rejecting Object (RO) became the Antilibidinal Object.
The Libidinal Ego (LE) remains the same throughout.
The Needed Object (NO) becomes the Exciting Object (EO) in 1952 and then in later accounts the Libidinal Object (LO).

In the Preconscious (Pcs) part of the mind:

He places the Ideal Object (I.O.)/Ego Ideal (E.I.) in the Preconscious (Pcs) part of the Central Ego (CE) [Author's addition to original diagram based upon the 1952 text (Clarke, 2005).]

In the Conscious (Cs) part of the mind:

The Central Ego (CE) remains the same throughout.
The Central Ego or Self also contain Preconscious and Unconscious aspects which are part of the unrepressed, everyday, unconscious and preconscious, aspects of our internal world.

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Fairbairn and Klein: Phantasy and Inner Reality

During the Second World War, when Fairbairn produced the papers developing his new model of inner reality, he made one contribution to the *Controversial Discussions* in 1942 (*From Instinct to Self* [*FITS*], vol. II, chap. 15), read in his absence by Glover, which represents his break with Kleinian thinking even if he had been hopeful of being accepted as a Kleinian.

> the explanatory concept of "phantasy" has now been rendered obsolete by the concepts of "psychic reality" and "internal objects" which the work of Mrs. Klein and her followers has done so much to develop . . . the time is now ripe for us to replace the concept of "phantasy" by a concept of "inner reality" peopled by the Ego and its internal objects. These internal objects should be regarded as having an organised structure, an identity of their own, and endopsychic existence and an activity as real within the inner world as those of any objects in the outer world.
>
> *(ibid., p. 294)*

In a 1942 letter to Marjorie Brierley, Fairbairn comments on his contribution, which was rejected by the Kleinians: "the Klein group disclaim any paternity – or should I say "maternity?" (ibid., p. 444). This sketches out the mature model of dynamic structure that appeared a year later in his paper on endopsychic structure. He also comments to Brierley that "The point of view I have developed is admittedly of Kleinian lineage, although privately I regard it as a definite advance beyond the Kleinian standpoint" (ibid.). Later in the same letter, in relation to his position within the British Psychoanalytic Society, he describes his theory as having fallen between two stools – the Kleinians and the (Anna) Freudians – "indeed between three, because I seem to have rather missed the boat as far as the Middle Group are concerned; and it is with the Middle Group that I should certainly align myself politically" (ibid.).

Fairbairn's View of Therapy

In his paper on the nature and aims of psychoanalytic treatment (1958), Fairbairn confesses that his own "chief conscious psycho-analytical interest . . . lies in promoting a more adequate formulation of psycho-analytical theory" (ibid., p. 78), and his hope is that such a reformulation "will have the effect of rendering the application of psycho-analytical theory a more effective therapeutic instrument" (ibid.). Fairbairn describes the therapeutic situation and the importance of the relationship with the therapist, to the outcome of the therapy.

> the disabilities from which the patient suffers represent the effects of unsatisfactory and unsatisfying object-relationships experienced in early life and perpetuated in an exaggerated form in inner reality; and . . . the actual relationship existing between the patient and the analyst as persons must be regarded as in itself constituting a therapeutic factor of prime importance. The existence of such a personal relationship in outer reality not only serves the function of providing a means of correcting the distorted relationships which prevail in inner reality and influence the reactions of the patient to outer objects, but provides the patient with an opportunity, denied to him in childhood, to undergo a process of emotional development in the setting of an actual relationship with a reliable and beneficent parental figure.
>
> *(ibid., p. 79)*

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Fairbairn sees therapy as a synthetic rather than an analytic activity regarding the split inner world, carried out between two people, analyst and analysand.

> the chief aim of psycho-analytical treatment is to promote a maximum "synthesis" of the structures into which the original ego has been split, in the setting of a therapeutic relationship with the analyst. Involved in the achievement of this aim are two further aims, viz. (a) a maximum reduction of persisting infantile dependence, and (b) a maximum reduction of that hatred of the libidinal object which, according to my theory, is ultimately responsible for the original splitting of the ego.
>
> *(ibid., pp. 83–84)*

> the primary aim of psycho-analytical treatment is to effect a synthesis of the personality by reducing that triple splitting of the pristine ego which occurs to some degree in every individual . . . *the greatest of all sources of resistance – viz. the maintenance of the patient's internal world as a closed system . . . it becomes still another aim of psycho-analytical treatment to effect breaches of the closed system which constitutes the patient's inner world, and thus to make this world accessible to the influence of outer reality*.
>
> *(ibid.)*

> psycho-analytical treatment resolves itself into a struggle on the part of the patient to press-gang his relationship with the analyst into the closed system of the inner world through the agency of transference, and a determination on the part of the analyst to effect a breach in this closed system and to provide conditions under which, in the setting of a therapeutic relationship, the patient may be induced to accept the open system of outer reality.
>
> *(ibid., p. 92)*

The death instinct and the repetition compulsion are both regarded by Fairbairn as a consequence of attachment to bad objects which have been internalised and repressed (Fairbairn, 1952, p. 78). His conception of the death instinct is

> an obstinate tendency on the part of the patient undergoing psycho-analytical treatment to keep his aggression localized within the confines of the closed system of the inner world.
>
> *(Fairbairn, 1958, p. 92)*

Fairbairn gives an account of the structural conformations that underlie both neurosis and psychosis in chapter 2 of his book (1952):

> the essential difference between a psychoneurosis and a psychosis . . . in my opinion . . . is quite simple, viz. to the effect that, whereas the psychoneurotic tends to treat situations in outer reality as if they were situations in inner reality (i.e. in terms of transference), the psychotic tends to treat situations in inner reality as if they were situations in outer reality.
>
> *(Fairbairn, 1958, p. 85n)*

As far as the Oedipus situation is concerned, Fairbairn believes that this is important for therapy but not for theory, since he believes that the child "comes to equate one parental object with

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the exciting object, and the other with the rejecting object and by so doing *the child constitutes the Oedipus situation for himself*" (Fairbairn, 1952, p. 124) much earlier than the time the classical Oedipus conflict arises.

The Psychology of Dynamic Structure as an Explanatory System

Whether or not Fairbairn was influenced by Craik's (1943) idea of a mental model as explanation or not, since there were always Freud's structural and topographic models to legitimise a model-based approach, nevertheless he quite explicitly refers to his model as an explanatory system. Fairbairn argues that "the psychology of dynamic structure" he has developed

> provides a more satisfactory basis than does any other type of psychology for the explanation of group phenomena.
>
> *(Fairbairn, 1952, p. 128)*

He argues that his model has the requisite variety to explain a wider set of psychoanalytic principles than Freud's:

> from a topographic standpoint, Freud's theory only admits . . . three factors (id, ego and super-ego) in the production of the variety of clinical states . . . my theory admits of the operation of five factors (central ego, libidinal ego, internal saboteur, exciting object and rejecting object) – even when the super-ego as I conceive it is left out of account . . . of the three factors envisaged in Freud's theory, only two (the ego and the super-ego) are structures properly speaking – the third (viz. the id) being only a source of energy. The energy proceeding from the id is . . . conceived by Freud as assuming two forms – libido and aggression. Consequently, Freud's theory admits of the operation of two structural and two dynamic factors in all. Freud's two dynamic factors find a place . . . in my own theory; but . . . the number of the structural factors is not two, but five. Thus . . . my theory permits of a much greater range of permutations and combinations than does Freud's theory.
>
> *(ibid., pp. 128–129)*

And Freud's dualism is unduly limiting. According to Freud, the endopsychic drama largely resolves itself into a conflict between the ego in a libidinal capacity and the super-ego in an anti-libidinal capacity. The original dualism inherent in Freud's earliest views regarding repression thus remains substantially unaffected by his subsequent theory of mental structure, whereas Fairbairn's theory

> possesses all the features of an explanatory system enabling psychopathological and characterological phenomena of all kinds to be described in terms of the patterns assumed by a complex of relationships between a variety of structures . . . [and] . . . possesses the advantage of enabling psychopathological symptoms to be explained directly in terms of structural conformations, and thus of doing justice to the unquestionable fact that, so far from being independent phenomena, symptoms are but expressions of the personality as a whole.
>
> *(ibid., p. 129)*

Fairbairn is concerned with the mutability of his model from the topographic and the economic standpoints. Topographically it is relatively immutable:

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> although I conceive it as one of the chief aims of psychoanalytical therapy to introduce some change into its topography by way of territorial adjustment.
>
> *(ibid., pp. 129–130)*

Fairbairn conceives it as among the most important functions of psychoanalytical therapy:

> (a) to reduce the split of the original ego by restoring to the central ego a maximum of the territories ceded to the libidinal ego and the internal saboteur, and (b) to bring the exciting object and the rejecting object so far as possible together within the sphere of influence of the central ego.
>
> *(ibid.)*

Economically, by contrast, the basic endopsychic situation is capable of very extensive modification and another of the chief aims of psychoanalytical therapy is to reduce to a minimum

> (a) the attachment of the subsidiary egos to their respective associated objects, (b) the aggression of the central ego towards the subsidiary egos and their objects, and (c) the aggression of the internal saboteur towards the libidinal ego and its object.
>
> *(ibid., p. 130)*

Fairbairn's Criticisms of Freud's Structural Model

At the beginning of his paper on psychoanalytic treatment (1958), Fairbairn gives a pithy statement of his object-relations theory, which is to

> replace Freud's description of the mental constitution in terms of the id, the ego and the superego. It has assumed the form of the description in terms of a libidinal ego, a central ego and an antilibidinal ego, together with their respective internal objects; and the basic endopsychic situation so constituted is conceived as resulting from the splitting of an original, inherent, unitary ego and of the object originally introjected by it.
>
> *(Fairbairn, 1958, p. 74)*

Fairbairn made many detailed investigations of aspects of Freud's psychoanalytic theory (1927, 1929a, 1929b, 1930, 1935, 1938a, 1938b, 1940, 1941, 1943a, 1943b, 1944), from which he developed his own model of personality. This is clearly parallel to Freud's structural model in some respects but is significantly different in terms of the scientific understanding of the physical and biological sciences that informed it.

Fairbairn's criticisms of Freud's model, which led to his proposing his own model, concerned advances in the understanding of the natural physical and biological world that had occurred since Freud developed his own ideas. The first objection was that in the modern scientific view energy and structure are inseparable:

> although Freud's whole system of thought was concerned with object-relationships, he adhered theoretically to the principle that libido is primarily pleasure-seeking, i.e. that it is directionless . . . I adhere to the principle that libido is primarily object-seeking, i.e. that it has direction . . . I regard aggression as having direction also, whereas . . . Freud regards aggression as . . . theoretically directionless. . . . Freud regards impulse (i.e. psychical energy) as theoretically distinct from structure, whereas I . . . adhere

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> to the principle of dynamic structure . . . if we conceive of energy as inseparable from structure, then the only changes which are intelligible are changes in structural relationships and in relationships between structures; and such changes are essentially directional.
>
> *(Fairbairn, 1952, p. 126)*

Fairbairn's second significant objection relates to the biological understanding of organisms and the burgeoning systems approach to understanding living organisms:

> The conception of erotogenic zones is based upon an atomic or molecular conception of the organism. . . . Such atomism seems to me a legacy of the past quite alien to modern biological conceptions, in accordance with which the organism is regarded as functioning as a whole from the start . . . it is impossible to gain any adequate conception of the nature of an individual organism if it is considered apart from its relationships to its natural objects; for it is only in its relationships to these objects that its true nature is displayed.
>
> *(ibid., pp. 138–139)*

These two scientific and philosophical criticisms of Freud's structural model are explored at length and in detail in Fairbairn's most important paper, "Endopsychic Structure Considered in Terms of Object-Relationships" (1944) and in part one, chapter 5 of his book *Object-Relationships and Dynamic Structure* (1946). At the beginning of a detailed review of the process, whereby a "psychology of dynamic structure" has developed out of a psychology of object-relationships, he offers the following:

> the ultimate principle . . . may be formulated in the general proposition that libido is not primarily pleasure-seeking, but object-seeking. The clinical material on which this proposition is based may be summarized in the protesting cry of a patient to this effect – "You're always talking about my wanting this and that desire satisfied; but what I really want is a father."
>
> *(ibid., p. 137)*

Fairbairn and Pringle-Pattison

Fairbairn, as I have argued, was influenced by Andrew Pringle-Pattison, who produced a number of influential books on personality and idealist philosophy (1887, 1890, 1897) and was regarded as the pre-eminent British [*sic*] idealist at the turn of the century. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* argues that personalism as a distinct philosophy or world view "focusing on the full, accumulated import of the concept of the person" only emerged in the context of a broad critical reaction against what could be called *impersonalistic* philosophies, which came to dominate the Enlightenment and Romanticism in the form of rationalistic and romantic forms of pantheism and idealism, from Spinoza to Hegel. This modified idealistic, theistic personalism became decisive via its late German representative, Rudolph Hermann Lotze, not only for the American, idealistic personalism but also for the parallel, British idealistic personalism whose leading representative was Andrew Pringle-Pattison.

From the beginning, personalism proclaimed in its own way the communitarian values of solidarity and interrelation. In their insistence on inviolable dignity, personalists resisted a utilitarianism which would make one person merely "useful" for another. Whereas individualism

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tends to seek the self above all and often views others as means to one's own profit, personalism seeks to make of the self a gift to another (personalism's historical antecedents: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/personalism/).

Pringle-Pattison taught Fairbairn during his undergraduate and postgraduate study in philosophy and divinity at Edinburgh University (1911–1915). Fairbairn also knew Pringle-Pattison, and Fairbairn's personal library, held by the National Library in Edinburgh (www.fairbairn.ac.uk), contains a book by Haldane (1921) that had been previously owned by Pringle-Pattison and contains a discussion of his later views on personality.

Mander, writing in 2005 of the philosophical landscape at the end of the First World War in Britain, says:

> For all its current empirical character British philosophy is not an unbroken lineage from the days of Bacon and Locke. From the second half of the nineteenth century into the early years of the twentieth the dominant school of philosophy in Britain was idealist; and this understood in a Kantian or Hegelian, not a Berkeleyan, way. The key figures from this period are T. H. Green, Edward and John Caird, and F. H. Bradley – all of whom put forward systems which were monistic as well as idealist. However, from an early date there existed also a rival school of Personal Idealists – for whom reality was best understood, not as a single spiritual structure, but as a plurality of distinct spirits. They included J.M.E. McTaggart, W. R. Sorley, J.J.C. Webb, Hastings Rashdall, and James Seth. Although this division between Absolute and Personal Idealism runs throughout these late nineteenth and early twentieth-century years, the 1918 Aristotelian Society symposium[2] is the only point at which we find a direct head-to-head debate between the two schools.
>
> *(Mander, 2005, p. 111)*

After a detailed look at the arguments presented by Bosanquet and Pringle-Pattison, Mander concludes that, at this point in the history of British philosophy, idealism was going out of vogue fast, and absolute versions were no better able to resist the ebbing fashion than personalist ones. The 1918 Aristotelian Society debate "summed up" rather than "inaugurated" a period of thought.

Whilst I think that there are parallels between Fairbairn's account of the development of the personality and Pringle-Pattison's historical and philosophical account as represented in his last *Gifford Lectures* (1922), I think that Pringle-Pattison's discussions of whether there is an enduring soul and what the nature of that might be have the most direct echoes in Fairbairn's account of the high point of his developmental schema, which goes from infantile dependence through a transitional phase to the achievement of mature dependence:

> mature dependence . . . is characterized . . . by a capacity on the part of a differentiated individual for co-operative relationships with differentiated objects. So far as the appropriate biological object is concerned, the relationship, is, of course, genital; but it is a relationship involving evenly matched giving and taking between two differentiated individuals who are mutually dependent, and between whom there is no disparity of dependence. Further, the relationship is characterized by an absence of primary identification and an absence of incorporation . . . never completely realized in practice, since there is no one whose libidinal development proceeds wholly without a hitch.
>
> *(ibid., p. 145)*

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I suggest the Edinburgh *Gifford Lectures* of 1922, "The Idea of Immortality", could be the key to the philosophy behind the object relations theory of personality developed by Ronald Fairbairn, his "psychology of dynamic structure". As has been argued, Pringle-Pattison's twin enemies were English empiricism and the Anglo variant of Hegelianism. According to Pringle-Pattison, both manners of philosophy degraded the independence of the individual:

> Each self is a unique existence, which is perfectly impervious . . . to other selves – impervious in a fashion of which the impenetrability of matter is a faint analogue.
>
> *(Pringle-Pattison, 1887, p. 232)*

Pringle-Pattison's comments here stand in stark contrast to the British and American Hegelianism of the turn of the 20th century. He asserted that personality should not be merged into the absolute:

> We are anthropomorphic . . . to the inmost fibre of our thinking . . . Every category . . . every description of existence or relation, is necessarily a transcript from our own nature and our own experience . . . Everything, down to the atom, is constructed upon the scheme of the conscious self, with its *multiplicity of states and its central interpenetrating unity*. We cannot rid our thought of its inevitable presupposition.
>
> *(ibid., p. 113; emphasis added)*

In Alexander Broadie's discussion of Pringle-Pattison's view of the self in his *A History of Scottish Philosophy* (2009), he says:

> Pringle-Pattison's claim therefore is that *a self must be a self for itself, not just an object to another who is subject in relation to our self-as-object; a self must be conscious of itself as a subject in relation to something other*. . . . This implies not that we are divine but that we finite spirits are no less truly selves than God is a self, that we are neither an adjectival qualification nor an adverbial modification of him, and we are therefore, as Pringle-Pattison affirms, exclusively ourselves, where the exclusiveness is so exclusive that it excludes even God. Our exclusiveness cannot be overcome except by means of our annihilation – we would cease to be selves in ceasing to stand over against other selves. This is a deeply un-Hegelian picture driven partly by a deliverance of consciousness as endorsing an uncompromising, unsurmountable real plurality as contrasted with the Hegelian idea that the real is one. The outcome is a version of personal idealism or personalism. Pringle-Pattison was the first of the Scottish, indeed the British, idealists to provide a detailed statement of personalism, and many followed him.
>
> *(Broadie p. 321; emphasis added)*

Hallett (1933), Pringle-Pattison's assistant, suggests that in *The Idea of God in the Light of Recent Philosophy* (1917) and *The Idea of Immortality* (1922) may be found Pringle-Pattison's "mature and detailed philosophical system" (Hallett, p. 143). The following brief discussion of Pringle-Pattison's conclusions in his 1922 *Gifford Lectures* tries to show the parallels that I believe exist between Fairbairn's and Pringle-Pattison's view of a person:

In Pringle-Pattison's discussion of Cartesian theory, he says:

> If we start with the living body as the embodied soul, the problem of interaction ceases to exist, and laboured schemes of parallelism become unnecessary . . . [and] . . . we

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> shall be on the way to a better understanding of the kind of unity which can really belong to soul or self.
>
> *(Pringle-Pattison, 1922, p. 92)*

While there are no direct discussions of embodiment per se in Fairbairn's work, Sutherland's comment that "[Fairbairn's] concept of a unified self that is an autonomous potential, at first, and which is then suffused with a sense of being a person in proportion as a mother's loving care is assimilated" (Sutherland, 1989, p. 169) does suggest this to me.

Pringle-Pattison discussion of parts and wholes might be profitably compared with Fairbairn's systemic view of organisms already cited above:

> The organism . . . is the first real whole, the first natural unity. It exhibits a *unity in multiplicity* far more impressive and far more important than the punctual unity of the hypothetical atom . . . in this unity and mutual implication of whole and parts we have the best analogue of the *kind* of unity which we may expect to find . . . in the self-conscious being.
>
> *(Pringle-Pattison, 1922, p. 93; emphasis added)*

This is a view which would seem to be consistent with Sutherland's assertion that

> having a self that is autonomous yet preserving its autonomy or identity by means of its matrix of relationships is the essential resource for effective enjoyable and satisfying living. . . . Fairbairn attributes all psychopathology to the splitting of the self in early experience.
>
> *(Sutherland, 1989, p. 169)*

Pringle-Pattison argues that Hume's criticism of a self, distinct from all its states and which remains the same through all their changes, is unanswerable,

> and his celebrated description of the mind as "nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity and are in perpetual flux and movement" is defective only because of the psychological atomism on which his whole theory is based.
>
> *(Pringle-Pattison, 1922, p. 96)*

Pringle-Pattison cites William James' dictum that "the passing thought is the only thinker" and argues that James overcomes Hume's atomism by the saying that "it is not to be taken . . . as a self-contained unit knowing only itself but as we really find it in life, appropriating to itself all the thoughts or states that went before" (ibid., pp. 97–98). He goes on to say, quoting Hume, that he cannot more properly compare the soul

> to anything than to a republic or commonwealth, in which several members are united by the reciprocal ties of government and subordination, and give rise to other persons, who propagate the same republic in the incessant changes of its parts . . . the idea of a system or of the *unity in multiplicity* which characterises a state or an organism supplies just what was lacking in his original account of the soul.
>
> *(ibid., p. 99; emphasis added)*

This I see as an approach that is closely related to Fairbairn's multiple-self model.

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Pringle-Pattison discusses the soul as "the systematic unity of the conscious experiences of a particular individual centre – the individual centre being defined or determined at the outset by the bodily organism" (ibid., pp. 99–100), which I see as another way of describing Fairbairn's pristine self. Pringle-Pattison goes on to assert the essential nature of the subject:

> Modern psychology has sometimes boasted of being a psychology without a soul . . . but no psychology can dispense with the conception of a subject. We must recognize, as Stout puts it, that "there is a mind and not merely mental states or processes" . . . every conscious or mental state is the state or experience of a conscious individual. "The universal conscious fact is not 'feelings and thoughts exist', but 'I think' and 'I feel'".
>
> *(ibid., p. 101)*

Returning to the importance of embodiment, Pringle-Pattison maintains that

> if we must indulge our imagination with the picture of some bearer of the conscious life, let us be satisfied with the body, in which that life is certainly rooted in a very real sense . . . it remains for each of us, throughout life, the centre from which we speak and act and look out upon the universe.
>
> *(ibid., pp. 103–104)*

While there is no explicit mention of embodiment in Fairbairn, I have always thought that his underlying position is one where a primitive self, a body ego if you will, exists from the beginning – his so-called pristine ego – which is never thought about separately from the body. It is an implicitly realist acceptance of our embodiment.

Pringle-Pattison then raises and defends the fundamental importance of the personality, which is a view surely shared by Fairbairn:

> A man's self will then be for us the coherent mind and character which is the result of the discipline of time, not some substantial unit or identical subject in his body all along . . . where such an evolution has been achieved, the self-conscious life is the pre-eminent reality, which the body in its structure and organization exists to actualise . . . the concrete individual, can be adequately or properly described only in terms of personality or character – by reference to his dispositions and affections, his interests and ideals . . . man, as self-conscious, can distinguish himself even from his Maker, and set his own will against the divine.
>
> *(ibid., p. 105)*

With its own parallel to Fairbairn's conception of therapy, Pringle-Pattison stresses the importance of love:

> The highest conception we can form of perfect personality is Love, not in any shallow sentimental sense, but the self-giving Love which expends itself for others and lives in their joys and sorrows.
>
> *(ibid., p. 195)*

In a comment of direct relevance to the question of the development of mature dependence, Pringle-Pattison comments on the uniqueness of the personality:

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> personality or selfhood . . . [cannot] . . . be conferred by another, it is emphatically something that must be won before there can be any question of its conservation. . . . If a man is no more than a loosely associated group of appetites and habits, the self as a moral unity has either flickered out or has never come into existence. To the constitution of such a real self, there must go some persistent purpose, or rather some coherent system of aims and ideals, and some glimpse at least, it would seem of the eternal values.
>
> *(ibid., p. 196)*

Pringle-Pattison's comments on the question of immortality suggests a more nuanced approach to mature dependence:

> there is no soul . . . except the unified personality built up by our own acts. . . . To assure people that, whatever they do, all will come right in the end is not an effective method of awakening them to the gravity of decisions here and now.
>
> *(ibid., p. 203)*

This suggests to me that Fairbairn's understanding of mature dependence is not in the realisation of a soul but the creation of a personality.

Other Potentially Relevant Philosophical Thinking That Might Be Compatible With Fairbairn's Theory

Since I have previously discussed the degree to which Fairbairn's theory and critical realism are compatible (2003, 2008b), I am sympathetic towards the critical realist personalism (CRP) of Christian Smith (2015) as a way of locating Fairbairn's model within contemporary debate. CRP's view of the person is totally consonant with Fairbairn's view, as this characterisation of a mature person from *To Flourish or Destruct* bear's witness:

> What is a person? By "person" I mean the particular kind of being that under proper conditions is capable of developing into . . . a conscious, reflexive, embodied, self-transcending centre of subjective experience, durable identity, moral commitment, and social communication who – as the efficient cause of his or her responsible actions and interactions – exercises complex capacities for agency and intersubjectivity in order to develop and sustain his or her own incommunicable self in loving relationships with other personal selves and with the nonpersonal world.
>
> *(ibid., p. 35)*

The places that Fairbairn's psychology of dynamic structure might engage with CRP are in the basic tenets of personalism:

> A moment's reflection by the (presumably sane) reader on their own subjective experience of personhood will validate this point about the person being and having a "centre of" coordinated awareness and activity. It is precisely the breakdown of such a "centre of" in the forms of multiple personality disorder, schizophrenia, and other psychotic thought and identity disorders that we judge that human personhood itself is being threatened by pathological person-damaging forces. The normally developed person, by contrast, operates primarily out of a deep, single, centred nucleus of being, self-governance and self-direction.
>
> *(ibid., p. 43)*

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It was of course quite explicitly to understand and treat these "pathological person-damaging forces" that Fairbairn developed his psychology of dynamic structure. I think that it could be useful to look at CRP from the perspective of Fairbairn's psychology of dynamic structure to see if and how this model might help to clarify CRP's principles and how CRP might be modified to properly take account of the unconscious aspects of our lives, since it is not clear that "the normally developed person" is as unproblematic as is implied by the quotation.

Conclusion

My investigations into the philosophical underpinnings of Ronald Fairbairn's "psychology of dynamic structure" have led me towards "personalism" as a potential "deep structure" of his approach. This personalism – aspects of which I believe Fairbairn could have taken, consciously or unconsciously, from Pringle-Pattison – grew out of Pringle-Pattison's detailed study of classical and enlightenment thought (Aristotle, Hegel, and the Scottish Enlightenment), which Fairbairn originally encountered as an undergraduate and was a topic of detailed public discussion at the time Fairbairn was still developing his own ideas. This view of Fairbairn's theory throws some light on the many similarities between his approach and that of John Macmurray (1957, 1961), who also adopted a form of personalism. I think that a secular critical realist personalism might be the best candidate for the philosophical foundation of a thoroughgoing object-relations psychoanalysis of the sort Fairbairn developed, a psychology of dynamic structure, that might also help us to change the social order to embrace relationships and dependencies rather than seeing them as fatal flaws.

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Note

1 For a recent synoptic view of Fairbairn's work see Clarke and Scharff (2014).
2 'Do finite individuals possess a substantive or an adjectival mode of being?' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1917–18, 18, pp. 479–581.

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