

# WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE SUPERECHO?

## *Loewald and the Future of Psychoanalysis*

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This article explores the diminished role of the superego in contemporary psychoanalysis, and it focuses on Loewald's perspective on the superego as original and as a possible way to rethink the meaning of the concept. Loewald saw the superego as representing the modality of the future; so, it beckons us forward and ought not be construed as merely critical. I also argue that Loewald's perspective on the superego anticipates the emerging literatures on mentalization (especially mentalized affectivity) and autobiographical memory.

**Keywords:** superego, Loewald, contemporary psychoanalysis, mentalization, mentalized affectivity

The meaning and use of the superego has attenuated in contemporary psychoanalysis, and no resurrection seems immanent or plausible. Thus, it might seem strange that the main focus of my paper will be on Loewald's view of the superego—all the more so because I shall not be offering a defense of the structural model. Indeed, I believe that we exist in a postpsychoanalytic climate, in which psychoanalytic concepts must be brought into contact with other fields of knowledge to thrive—a challenge that we retreat from at our peril. So, let me begin by acknowledging that my project is fundamentally about loss in reflecting on a seemingly endangered concept in a seemingly endangered field. Lingering with loss, though, ought to be distinguished from a depressing tale of woe, and my ultimate aim will be to demonstrate how aspects of Loewald's thinking about the superego remains relevant and insightful, anticipating the emerging literatures on mentalization (especially mentalized affectivity) and autobiographical memory.

I begin by discussing the reduced and neglected role of the superego in psychoanalysis and speculate about some of the reasons why this is the case. This entails both a consideration of theoretical shifts within psychoanalysis and cultural shifts that are extrinsic to psychoanalysis. In the following section of the paper, I introduce Loewald's perspective on the superego, which manages to be consistent with previous

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psychoanalytic views, and yet sets forth the distinctive hypothesis that the superego is linked to temporality, particularly the modality of the future. There is a clear influence of Heidegger here, with whom Loewald studied, although Loewald placed the emphasis more on the experience of loss and separation, and less on our being-toward-death. In the third and final part of the paper, I explore how Loewald's notion of the superego points to the concept of mentalization, insofar as it has to do with being able to observe and interpret our own mental, and especially emotional states, and recent ideas about autobiographical memory, which emphasize the capacity to time travel among the past, present, and future, and I conclude by reflecting further on the current fate of the superego.

### History and Context of the Superego

There are different narratives to bring to bear to understand the diminished role of the superego in psychoanalysis. One tale—*intrinsic to psychoanalysis*—is that Freud (1940) linked the superego to the resolution of the Oedipal complex, and as psychoanalysis moved to appreciate pre-Oedipal issues in development, the superego became a casualty and was downgraded in importance. Yet, this could only be partially right, given that Melanie Klein (1975) had already proposed that the superego has an earlier role in development before the Oedipal stage. Another complication concerning this narrative has to do with mounting skepticism about metapsychology, that is, the version of metapsychology that reifies the id, ego, and superego as actual entities.

Under the convergent influence of object relations theory, self psychology, attachment theory, and relational theory, the language of self and other has replaced the terms of the structural model. Even Freudians have bailed from the structural model (Brenner, 2000). The language of self and other has been indisputably adopted in psychoanalysis, expanding the theory to include early life experience and the subtle vicissitudes of relationships. These new psychoanalytic orientations have made crucial contributions to our understanding of technique through the deeper embroilment of the analyst and the intersubjective intricacies of the therapeutic process. It is ironic, though, there has been a loss of specificity in some respects; for example, in displacing the superego, it becomes less obvious how to capture the parental role as transmitting culture.<sup>1</sup>

As a measure of the increasing irrelevance of the superego across psychoanalytic orientations, I cite the fact that it is not even indexed in many of the well-received, recent psychoanalytic books: Aron's *A Meeting of the Minds* (2001) and his new book with Starr, *A Psychotherapy for the People* (2013); Bromberg's *Standing in the Spaces* (2001) and his new book, *The Shadow of the Tsunami* (2011); Cooper's *Objects of Hope* (2000); Eagle's *Attachment and Psychoanalysis* (2013); Lear's *Therapeutic Action* (2003) and *Open Minded* (1998); Mayes, Fonagy, and Target's *Developmental Science and Psychoanalysis* (2011); Orange's *The Suffering Stranger* (2011) and *Thinking for Clinicians* (2009); Schlesinger's *The Texture of Treatment* (2003); Schore's *The Science of the Art of Psychotherapy* (2012); Stern's *Partners in Thought* (2010); Wachtel's *Cyclical Psychodynamics and the Contextual Self* (2014), *Therapeutic Communication* (2011), and *Relational Theory and the Practice of Psychotherapy* (2010); Wallin's *Attachment in Psycho-*

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<sup>1</sup> What I mean here is that if psychoanalysis has been vulnerable to criticism in that it undervalues the influence of culture, it seems all the more unfortunate that the superego, the main source of how culture enters the individual, has been displaced.

*therapy* (2007); and even my coauthored book with Fonagy, Gergely, and Target, *Affect Regulation, Mentalization, and the Development of the Self* (2002). The superego is briefly mentioned in connection with Freud's views in Safran's *Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Therapies* (2012), Summers' *The Psychoanalytic Vision* (2013), and McWilliams' *Psychoanalytic Diagnosis* (2011). Even Phillips' *Becoming Freud* (2014) does not mention the superego!<sup>2</sup>

Another tale about the superego is less about having lost its role than having acquired a shifting and altered one. In this account, the focus comes to be on the negative aspects of the superego—the immature superego or, what tends to be most prevalent, the harsh or punitive superego. I would wager, in fact, that the next time that the reader has the occasion to hear a psychoanalyst speak about the superego, the descriptive adjective *harsh* or *punitive* will accompany the term. I would wager even more that the next time one hears a psychoanalyst speak about the superego; it will *not* be about a patient whose superego needs to be strengthened.

In this connection, it may be helpful to say a bit more about the history of the term *superego* in psychoanalysis. One side of this legacy regards the superego mainly in a forbidding light. A striking, early example of this is found Alexander's (1927) characterization of the superego in terms of "the corrupt police," while analogizing the id to "the inner terrorist" and the ego to "the long-suffering citizen." Such depictions of the superego have resonated especially with Lacanians. Zizek (2007) articulated this view with perverse extravagance: "The old cynical Stalinist motto about the accused at the show trials who professed their innocence ("the more they are innocent, the more they deserve to be shot") is superego at its purest" (p. 80).

Nevertheless, there has always been an alternative perspective that evaluates the superego in a more positive light. An example of this is found in Wälder's (1936) argument that the superego is a source of human goodness and, when functioning well, serves to ensure human freedom. There is a literature that hails the superego as the source of good feelings that accompany the experience of having a good conscience. Sandler (1960) noted, for example, that for children, the superego can be experienced as love and well-being. Sandler provided a neologism for the positive feelings associated with love as a result of superego approval: "eupathy." Around the same time, Schafer (1960) also wrote a defense of the loving aspect of the superego. A bit later in the sixties, there was a last gasp literature that blamed permissiveness and a lax superego for the emergent youth culture (Post, 1972).

It would be fruitful to carry out a rigorous and comprehensive study of the history of the superego, which surprisingly has never been done.<sup>3</sup> Both the positive and the negative aspects of the superego can be found in Freud, and Freud's views, as discussed in a review by Furer (1972), were not wholly consistent. The first analyst who formally distinguished between positive and negative aspects of the superego, according to Fenichel (1954) was Radó (1928). Jacobson (1964) developed this further, delineating between a superego that is dominated by aggression versus one that is guided by libido—the former presumably corresponding to the negative emphasis and the latter suggesting a more positive aspect of the superego.

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<sup>2</sup> I can attest to the fact that the superego is not included in the indexes of these aforementioned works, but not that it is unmentioned in the texts.

<sup>3</sup> Writing in this journal, Frank (1999) covered a wide spectrum of psychoanalytic perspectives on the superego, arguing that the concept was no longer relevant, although its functions in terms of social learning and responsibility remained valuable.

In my opinion, the positive aspect of the superego lost out conclusively around 1968 or so, when it no longer seemed credible to imagine an internalized parental object as nonauthoritarian (that is, apart from the hope for revolution). Theorists such as [Marcuse \(1955\)](#) and others were more interested in envisioning the ego becoming more id-like, rather than having faith in the prospect of internal harmony. This battle continued through the seventies and eighties, and is evident, for example, in [Jessica Benjamin's \(1988\)](#) critique of Christopher Lasch, in which she construed his concern about the growth of narcissistic tendencies in our culture as a “panegyric to the superego” (p. 157). Postmodern influences in psychoanalytic theory have put a further dent in the superego, as the language of multiple selves has conclusively replaced Freud's three agencies of the mind for many psychoanalysts.

The decrease in relevance of the superego is difficult to interpret, and I have no wish to convey nostalgia for the good old days, when the superego had a masculine swagger. I do wonder, following [Rieff \(1966\)](#), whether any culture can exist without interdictions that manifest themselves in constellations that are manifest through something such as a superego. Recent research has drawn attention to the evolutionary function of parenthood as inculcating culture, not just the aim of producing individual selves. Gergely ([Gergely and Unoka, 2008](#)), an infant researcher, defended what he termed the “pedagogical stance,” infants’ prewired disposition to be open to direction from their parents to belong to culture—an idea that requires “epistemic trust” but also must entail some mechanism of internalization. The notion of limiting and transforming the role of the superego is clearly a very different proposition than the fantasy of living without it. For now, let us say that, for better or worse, the superego is no longer viewed as it once was. This is true both within psychoanalysis and within the culture, which are, no doubt, can be linked through the change in the kinds of patients who seek out psychotherapy. Once upon a time, patients came to psychotherapy because of overburdened superegos; it is more likely these days that patients report a sense of not knowing what they are living for, rather than that they are failing to live up to something. I return to this issue toward the end of my paper.

### Loewald on the Superego

A number of scholars—[Chodorow \(2003\)](#), [Whitebook \(2004\)](#), and [Fogel \(1991\)](#)—have commented on the uniqueness of Loewald’s writing, which embodied both a conservative and progressive quality. This is especially true of his view of the superego, which stays within the party line that it emerges from the Oedipal complex, and yet manages to set forth an entirely new way of thinking: that the superego, as all psychic structures, are constituted through time, not space. There is a characteristic subtlety in how Loewald managed to sidestep most of the contentious issues around the superego. He avoided making too strong of a distinction between the ego ideal and the superego, and he also managed not to take a clear position on the positive and negative aspects of the superego, basically making room for both.

Loewald was wary of inscribing the superego as a fixed entity, and emphasized the capacity of the superego to undergo development. This means that the superego can function in a beneficial way or not. The superego is amenable to progress and growth. However, [Loewald did not rule out regression, as is apparent in his argument concerning termination in the later essay “Comments on Some Instinctual Manifestations of Superego Formation” \(1973\)](#). In general, I would say that Loewald did not linger on the persecutory

side of the superego, highlighting instead the potential richness of self-observation. The superego can be judgmental, in Loewald's account, but he seemed comfortable with the assumption that such self-blame could be appropriate and deserved.

Loewald's main discussions of the superego are in "Internalization, Separation, Mourning and the Superego," "The Superego and the Ego Ideal," both published in 1962 (1962a, 1962b; although the latter was written 2 years later), and in "The Waning of the Oedipus Complex" (1973). In Loewald's seminal article on "Internalization, Separation, Mourning and the Superego," he puts forth the intriguing idea that the superego was the internal representation of the temporal mode of the future. Here is what he said precisely,

The superego, inasmuch as it is the internal representative of parental and cultural standards, expectations, fears, and hopes, is the intrapsychic representation of the future. Only insofar as we are ahead of ourselves, insofar as we recognize potentialities in ourselves which represent more than we are at present, from which we look back at ourselves as we are at present, can be we said to have a conscience. The voice of conscience speaks to us as the mouthpiece of the superego, from the point of view of the inner future which we are envisioning. One might say that in the voice of conscience the superego speaks to the ego as being capable or incapable of encompassing the superego as the inner future toward which we move. (Loewald, 1962a, p. 1131)

What is striking in this passage is that the superego operates from a perspective of what has yet to happen, reveling in the hypothetical realm of possibility. Moreover, although the superego looks forward, it does not limit itself to the future, but encompasses the past and the present.

In connecting psychic structure to temporality, Loewald ventured the proposal that the superego represents the future, the ego the present, and the id the past. However, Loewald (1962b) rejected limiting each of these agencies to a single modality of time. This is made abundantly clear in "The Superego and the Ego Ideal," when Loewald stated, "All this we can do with ourselves only insofar as we ahead of ourselves, looking back at ourselves from a point of reference that is provided by the potentialities we envisage for ourselves or of which we despair" (p. 113). And he added: "The superego then would represent the past as seen from a future, the id as it is to be organized" (p. 118). It is at the heart of Loewald's argument to claim that the superego could grow and that an integration of the ego and the superego was attainable. As Fong (2014) argues, this integration manifests itself through language and has a dialectical quality. Loewald's view can be differentiated from other ego psychologists in stressing that the superego develops through the experience of separation and loss, wherein internalization supplants external relationships.

Loewald's account evocatively referred to conscience as the voice of the superego. In the long passage cited, Loewald did not emphasize morality as such; he referred to "parental and cultural standards" but also to emotions such as "fear and hope." His language turned Heideggerian, specifically in linking the superego to the notion of taking responsibility for oneself, "self responsibility" in "The Waning of the Superego," which profoundly differs from the superego as exacting conformity through external standards (Loewald, 1979). Loewald seemed to be borrowing from some of the psychoanalytic perspectives that affirmed a positive role for the superego that had already been mentioned. Loewald did not seem at all compelled by the negative role of the superego, which had become dominant in psychoanalysis, and before that, had its source in Nietzsche's (1967) view of "bad conscience" as an illness (p. 88). For Loewald, the superego was an activity of thinking; it enabled self-evaluation and did not have to be a source of self-torment.

In elucidating this concept of the superego, I would like to mention Edith Jacobson's view because her psychoanalytic project was also to bring ego psychology and object relations together. Writing around the same time as Loewald, [Jacobson \(1964\)](#) proposed that the superego had a regulatory role. In particular, she explicitly emphasized the role of the superego as regulating affects, especially the affect of guilt. The superego functions as a kind of safety device that monitors self-esteem. Jacobson provided more detail than Loewald about the cultural uses of the superego—as a taboo against matricide and patricide, and delineating the extent to which it is gender specific (also see [Bernstein \(1983\)](#) on this latter point). Like Loewald, though, Jacobson raised the hope for inner harmony, observing that the ego and the superego were not at odds with each other to the same extent that the ego and the id necessarily were (p. 128). Loewald and Jacobson also concurred that the superego was not necessarily tarnished with aggression, and optimally was guided by Eros. Loewald was captivated by the hypothetical and speculative quality of the superego; Jacobson provided a more utilitarian function that existed alongside and helped to govern everyday life.

### Reimagining the Superego

Let us turn to address the contemporary relevance of Loewald's perspective on the superego. As I stated, my intention is not exactly to resuscitate the superego. Loewald's (and Jacobson's) view, can be appreciated because they challenge some of the assumptions that most readily come to mind about the concept. Whether this means that the superego remains directly applicable to our own cultural world is a separate question. Indeed, it seems like a good measure of how much has changed in the last 50 years that the superego seems so antiquated. The issue that I would like to explore is: Can we discern and preserve valuable aspects of superego functioning that could be useful for the present?

Together, Loewald and Jacobson used the superego to set forth a capacity of the mind, which must be influenced by others, and that is perspective taking, that is, has distance from immediate experience and entails a consciousness that is not locked into the present. Such a consciousness is able to be welcoming to the future, but not in a way that is neglectful either of the past or the present. Loewald's emphasized the value of shifting temporal perspectives and the ultimate challenge of self-responsibility, whereas Jacobson more fully embraced the language of regulation of self and emotions. Both thinkers remained wed to the primacy of the intrapsychic, although object relations were shown to mediate and determine our internal worlds.

Attachment theory has made an important contribution to how we understand internalization: that it is the quality of primary relationships that becomes internalized, not just attitudes, beliefs, and values. Attachment theory has evolved beyond [Bowlby's \(1980\)](#) original ideas about "working models" as reduplications of the external, real relationship between infants and primary caregivers. [Main, Kaplan, and Cassidy \(1985\)](#) brought attachment theory closer to psychoanalysis in acknowledging that representation mediates between internal and external reality. Moreover, [Fonagy and colleagues \(2002\)](#) pushed attachment theory to appreciate that the aim of attachment was, not just to ensure safety, but to spur the process of self-representation and the agentive self.

The most relevant part of attachment theory for our purposes is "mentalization," a development capacity that emerges definitively at 3 to 4 years of age, and allows for more

complex and accurate mind reading.<sup>4</sup> Mentalization entails the capacity to read and interpret the mental states of others and ourselves. To be more precise, it has been shown that infants whose caregivers mentalize about them become mentalizers themselves (Allen, Fonagy, & Bateman, 2008; Fonagy, Bateman, & Luyten, 2012). In turn, mentalizing can involve trying to make sense of another person—such as in an ambiguous social situation—or trying to understand and fathom one's own states of mind. Its ultimate meaning is found in being able to access and make use of how others see one as part of one's view of oneself. Mentalizing has an intersubjective basis, which distinguishes it from allied concepts such as the self-observing ego or psychological mindedness.

Mentalization is a metacognitive ability, wherein we step back and entertain multiple perspectives. It is defined by the ability to wear beliefs lightly, that is, to be open-minded and curious, with an ample appreciation of the fallibility of our knowledge. In generating various possible interpretations, mentalization has an imaginative aspect. In addition, mentalization has a role as a kind of hindsight, which as Freeman (2010) argued, allows us to attain new levels of self-understanding. It can help us predict behavior, but it often manifests itself—as the Owl of Minerva—subsequent to action.<sup>5</sup> The understanding of mentalization that I favor means that it is often the case that we mentalize in the face of realizing that we have failed to mentalize. We do not yet know how likely it is to mentalize either predictively or retrospectively. It is worth noting, too, that the psychoanalytic understanding of mentalization differs from cognitive psychology in emphasizing the intermingling of cognition and affect, that is, cognition that is infused with affect, not cognition prevailing over affect.

The term *mentalized affectivity* marks the specific type of mentalization that involves the reevaluating of emotions (Fonagy et al., 2002; Jurist, 2005, 2008, 2010). Mentalized affectivity overlaps with the concept of affect regulation, but without the premise that the affect ought to be transformed (either upward or downward) in the process, as much as it is given new meaning. Mentalized affectivity is predicated on a number of component skills, such as the ability to identify, distinguish, refine, and communicate emotions. In helping patients to improve their mentalized affectivity, it is critical to evaluate their relation to emotions and where they might be having trouble and require help.

Mentalized affectivity is germane for all psychotherapies, not just psychoanalysis, as it entails skills that enable us to continue to process and reprocess our emotional experience over time. As we have seen, Jacobson (1964) attributed to the superego the function of regulating emotions. Loewald did so implicitly, although he mainly affirmed the superego as a metacognitive ability, emphasizing the dimension of the future and our ongoing need to (re)interpret the past. Indeed, Loewald made the startling and brilliant point in “*Psychoanalysis as an Art and the Fantasy Character of the Psychoanalytic Situation*” (1975) in the context of discussing how present experience could alter memory that: “it is thus not only true that the present is influenced by the past, but also that the past—as a living force within the patient—is influenced by the present” (Fogel, 1991,

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<sup>4</sup> As I prepared this article for publication, I came across an article by Holmes (2011) that links the superego to attachment and mentalization theory. Holmes highlighted positive aspects of the superego such as its regulatory role, offering an interesting defense of the mature superego as adjudicating boundaries. I am less comfortable than Holmes with the normative implications of the mature superego, which he averred, was consistent with “new testament morality.”

<sup>5</sup> The Owl of Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom, was famously invoked by Hegel (1821/1967) to convey that philosophy can only comprehend history retrospectively, not as it actually unfolds.

p. 139). Memory of the past is not static, and this inspires a challenge for the superego to recreate and rework it as we move forward in life ([Singer & Conway, 2011](#)).

Mentalization and mentalized affectivity may be linked to the superego insofar as they denote a metalevel capacity to observe oneself, to tolerate and adjudicate ambiguity, and to do so with flexibility and with the potential for converging accuracy. These terms have the advantage of not requiring the baggage of an entity with agency (the superego) within an entity with agency (the self). It is worth noting that mentalization, unlike the superego, can be concerned with understanding others; however, it includes fathoming the internalized other that is within, and in that sense, may be regarded as a related concept. Mentalization and mentalized affectivity also do not have the same, explicitly moral connotations as the superego, although they do affirm the value of honest self-reckoning.

A crucial link between Loewald's understanding of the superego and mentalized affectivity can be located in autobiographical memory. Autobiographical memory provides the source for both, which are active processes. Autobiographical memory derives from episodic memory; it allows us to expand consciousness from focusing on immediate reality to what has been called "extended consciousness" by [Damasio \(2010\)](#) or "auto-noetic consciousness" by [Wheeler, Stuss, and Tulving \(1997\)](#) and others. This form of consciousness is distinguished by reflexivity and by remembering through re-experiencing. Damasio and others have argued that autobiographical memory fosters the autobiographical self, that is, a narrative account that weaves autobiographical memories together in a meaningful way. [Singer and Conway \(2011\)](#) made the case for "self-defining memories," memories that stand out as profoundly influencing the sense of self, both how it evolved and what it cherishes in value. [Nelson and Fivush \(2004\)](#) stressed that narrative skills are necessary for the creation of meaning from autobiographical memory. [Blagov and Singer \(2004\)](#) and [Singer, Blagov, Berry, and Oost \(2013\)](#) helpfully observed that the autobiographical self was based on narratives that are formed from integrating autobiographical memories. It is interesting that there is growing, research literature suggesting that a paucity of autobiographical memories is predictive of psychopathology, especially depression and trauma ([Williams et al., 2007](#)).

Loewald's speculative insights about the superego anticipated mentalization and autobiographical memory. The superego pushes us to enlarge our consciousness through self-observation and probing self-evaluation. Yet, as a psychoanalyst, he did not suppose self-transparency or a view from above that looks down and surveys what is below. The gap between knowing and feeling is persistent, even if it can be transcended. Loewald's notion of "responsibility for the self" dovetailed well with the challenge of mentalizing and forging an autobiographical self. Indeed, this notion of responsibility for oneself, harks back to [Heidegger \(1927/1962\)](#), in requiring an anticipatory sensibility that the latter described as "resoluteness" (*Entschlossenheit*). However, in Loewald, there is a greater obligation to embrace and pursue the uncertain realm of the past. To some extent, Loewald presciently moved in the direction of the work of contemporary philosophers working in the area of moral psychology, such as [Charles Taylor \(1989\)](#) and [Jeffrey Blustein \(2008\)](#), who articulated ideal agency in terms of cultivation of understanding from the past.

Loewald did utilize the more conventional language of "maturity," which was par for the course of ego psychology and unavoidably has strongly normative connotations. He seemed open to a distinction between the post-Oedipal superego as flexible versus the pre-Oedipal ego ideal as representing something less developed and more rigid, but he did not emphasize the contrast between the superego and the ego ideal, as [Chasseguet-Smirgel \(1985\)](#) and others did. For Loewald, the superego resembled other psychic functions in undergoing growth and change. The most perspicuous conclusion is that for him, a flexible

superego is a well-functioning one. In emphasizing both self-evaluation and the future, Loewald generously imagined that where one has fallen short, a better outcome might be possible moving forward.

It ought to be acknowledged that Loewald was defending an intrapsychic perspective, and thus underestimated the realm of intersubjectivity, which we have come to have a greater appreciation of these days in psychoanalysis. I am inclined to see the intrapsychic perspective as a necessary but insufficient account, but it is possible to argue that the very distinction of intrapsychic versus intersubjective obscures as much as it reveals and needs to be redrawn. It is certainly a fair criticism of Loewald that he did not concern himself with the ongoing, real impact of relating to others, in particular, others' superegos. It seems less fair to criticize Loewald retrospectively, based on our deeper awareness of early sociality and our knowledge of the extent to which the analyst contributes to the quality of the relationship between patient and analyst, and thus influences treatment outcomes.

What is appealing about Loewald's approach to the superego is that it is located in the interstices between our wishes and our obligations. The superego comes from outside of ourselves but becomes part of us. It marks the degree to which we are social beings, powerfully influenced by the values of our families and culture, and yet not completely by them. Ideally, the superego becomes mediated through our autonomy. Thus, the superego summons us to choose our obligations, not simply to have them imposed on us.

Let us now turn our attention back to the issue of what has happened to the superego. It is not contentious to say that psychoanalysts pay less attention to the superego than they once did. At the same time, there seems to be a dawning awareness that this issue deserves greater attention, as [Wurmser \(2004\)](#) and [Holmes \(2011\)](#) argued. The change in psychoanalytic theory is, in part, a reflection of that patients presenting in psychotherapy, as well as people in our culture, in general, seem less preoccupied with superego issues. It is not difficult to think of many clinical encounters, for example, a high functioning lawyer who, desperate to support a lavish lifestyle, would refer to overcharging clients with a sheepish glee, and no real guilt; or a college student who would regularly hire a pricey service that produced freshly written, sophisticated term papers—neither of whom were concerned with the ethical aspect of these choices, but neither of whom would easily fit the diagnosis of psychopathy. But who knows how generalizable such examples are?

There is reason to be legitimately worried about the fate of the superego in our culture. The French social theorist, [Stiegler \(2013\)](#), dwelled precisely on this theme, asserting that in our culture "superegoization is liquidated." May its loss portend the acceptability of neglectful attitudes to others? May it also, in the opposite direction, inspire fantasies of blissful reliance on others? The demise of the superego could easily mean losing the middle ground between being self-defining and depending on others, the twin underlying needs of all personalities, according to [Blatt \(2008, 2013\)](#). The more that the role of the superego has become uncertain, the more, we might suspect, that it might be functioning in underground and pernicious ways.

No cultures exist without superego functions. If the superego is the vehicle for how individuals evaluate themselves, imagine them in the future, and for how cultures reproduce themselves, it could not be possible for it just to disappear? Perhaps, it is the case that individuals in our culture find it awkward to conjure the future—presumably because doing so is anxiety producing in some heightened sense. We may wonder if there has been a breakdown in our culture's ability to reproduce itself, given the state of education and the crisis in the humanities. If only 7% of undergraduates are majoring in the humanities (half the percentage 40 years ago), as was reported recently in the *New*

*York Times* (Schulten, 2013), surely there will be a body of knowledge that no longer will be transmitted or regarded as meaningful. Some of the warning signs about our culture have been captured by postmodernism, in which the perpetual acceleration of life increasingly produces the feeling that we are locked into an eternal present, unmoored from the past and the future.

It is beyond the aim of this article to ponder the current state of the superego, which deserves its own study. On the face of things, there has been a coarsening of the superego, in which fame seems to have replaced virtue as embodying our cultural ideals. There is not much room for admiring someone's goodness, unless as in the case of Derek Jeter, it is fused with fame and athletic prowess. Perhaps, the opposite of fame is the status of victimhood, where one externalizes blame as belonging to the "Other," thereby preserving goodness as belonging to the self. Other tendencies in our culture reinforce the externalization of the superego, such as fundamentalism, where individual superegos merge with the group or with charismatic figures who represent the group. Yet, no matter how we conceive of the superego, it seems hard to believe that it could offer protection in our Orwellian world, in which to be is to be monitored.

In the spirit of Loewald, I am prepared to defend a version of the concept of the superego that shares some functions. It is useful to have a concept that captures how values are internalized through caregivers, how this allows us to have standards by which we evaluate ourselves, and how this capacity enables us to time travel mentally, including looking forward to the future. Such a concept connects to the project of creating an autobiographical self, that is, a self that is self-determining but shaped by its experiences and environment.

What I love and miss about the superego is the logic of ambivalence that underlies it. There is always a gap between where we are and where we would like to be; we elude ourselves eternally and hilariously, though not necessarily menacingly in my account. We should strive to hold onto Loewald's appreciation for how the superego can change, grow, and be molded into new forms. Translation of the superego into current terms is helpful for understanding mental life and for dialogue across fields. Perhaps, there is a case to be made for the neurobiology of the superego. But I must conclude, without much consolation: The superego has receded, and cannot be salvaged, but neither can we really live without it. To live with this knowledge, to experience this more fully, to seek new ways of coping, I think, is an affirmation of, rather than a rejection of, psychoanalysis.

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