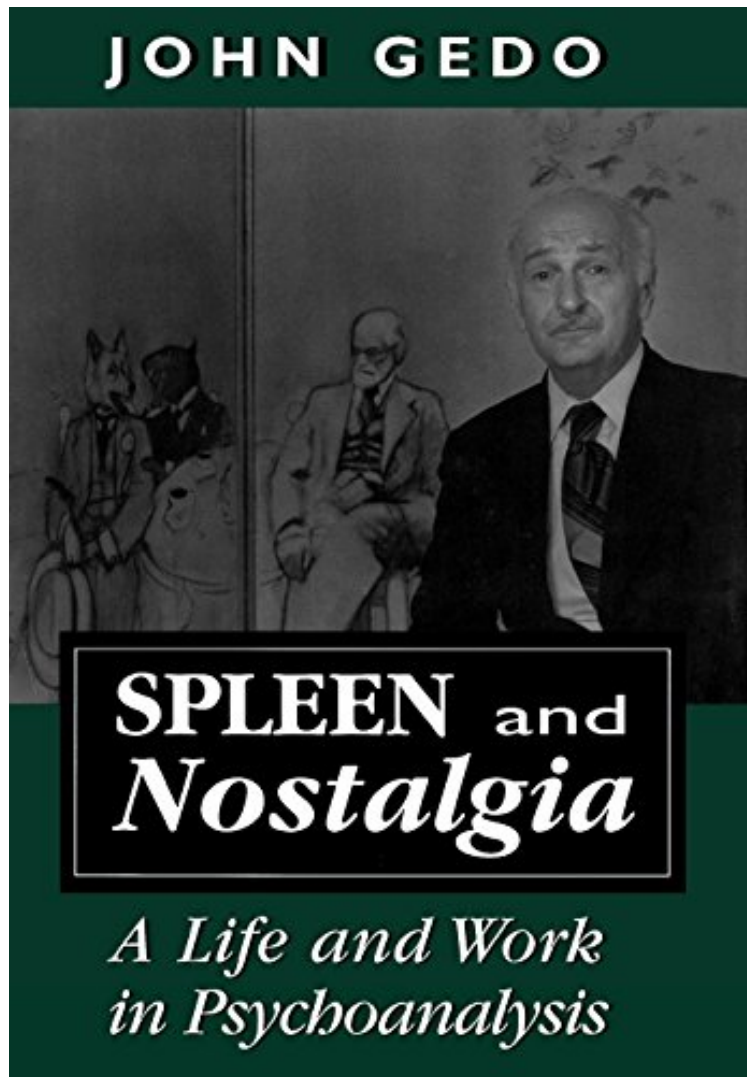


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Spleen and Nostalgia: A Life and Work in Psychoanalysis

John E. Gedo

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John E. Gedo : Spleen and Nostalgia: A Life and Work in Psychoanalysis before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Spleen and Nostalgia: A Life and Work in Psychoanalysis:

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Engrossing slices of recent American psychoanalytic history. By Marion Lustig-- Spleen and Nostalgia exemplifies the passionate and forthright approach of one of the most prolific living thinkers in the psychoanalytic field. The list of Gedo's books and articles runs to eight pages as an appendix to the book. John Gedo shares Freud's passion for the psychoanalytic field but does not romanticize it. Although psychoanalysis has many contributions to make, Gedo does not think it contains the central keys to unlocking our human universe. Throughout his long life in psychoanalysis, Gedo, like a few of his Chicago colleagues, has

welcomed the contributions of advances in other fields such as biology, artistic creativity and systems theory. He never regarded psychoanalysis as embodying a boundless and exclusive world view and has viewed collaboration with colleagues from other disciplines as occurring on equal terms. Gedo sees his account as psychoanalytic both because it tries to speak the truth and because it proceeds in an associative manner. Any suspicion that analysts display far more than their share of hubris is vindicated in this memoir. His experience with the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute from when he trained there (1956-1961) to the present time together with his involvement with the American Psychoanalytic Association brought him into contact with many other prominent psychoanalysts. In particular, Gedo explores his close relationship with Heinz Kohut in detail. Gedo emigrated from Hungary with his parents, arriving in the US in 1941. He found his analytic training at the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis during the golden age of psychoanalysis in the fifties to be mostly very pleasurable. Gedo was taught how to fight by his combative training analyst, Max Gitelson who became prominent in the politics of American psychoanalysis. Gedo describes his training in an engaging and detailed way, including his unhappy experiences in supervision with Joan Fleming who, as dean, was able to blackball Gedo for some years making Gedo an 'internal exile'. This was partly because of his disposition which disapproved of the self-satisfied psychoanalytic community. His dissatisfaction with the scientific complacency and imperialism that he saw as endemic not only in the Chicago Institute but in American psychoanalysis in general meant that he did not fit well in an institute he likened to a papacy corrupted by worldly ambition, a charge he levelled at American psychoanalysis in general. The titles of two of the book's chapters, 'Cosa Nostra' and 'Machine Politics' convey the flavour of Gedo's view of American psychoanalysis, and the Chicago Institute in particular. Under George Pollock as director, in Gedo's view the Chicago Institute 'deteriorated into a political machine'. Unfortunately, he is not far off the mark. From my own research on American psychoanalysis (Kirsner *Unfree Associations: Inside Psychoanalytic Institutes*, Process Press, 1999). I can only confirm the accuracy of Gedo's perspective on these matters. Gedo describes his experiences as a longtime member of the American Psychoanalytic Association's Committee on Institutes, and concludes that the educational standard of the American institutes is 'shamefully poor', on the level of community colleges rather than research universities. But Gedo clearly found very valuable his involvement with The American Psychoanalytic Association's research organisation of analysts, The Center for Advanced Psychoanalytic Studies, which meets annually at Princeton. Between 1955 and 1994 when he retired, Gedo had a full analytic practice, which for much of that period was not unusual in Chicago. His hierarchical theory of psychoanalysis, adumbrated with Arnold Goldberg in their *Models of the Mind*), was to form the nub of much of his intellectual development thereafter. In Gedo's opinion, 'The future of psychoanalysis will be based on the hierarchical model of mental functions, that is on the simultaneous legacies of all previous developmental phases'. This should include 'the progressive hierarchical organization of cerebral functions'. Gedo argues that therapeutic psychoanalysis should aim at the expansion of psychological skills. This implies that previously missing procedural (apraxic) skills should be acquired in treatment. This is 'beyond interpretation' since the elucidation of mental contents is not sufficient and biology needs to be integrated into psychoanalysis. Although there is some explication of Gedo's scientific contributions in this memoir based on his recollections and observations about psychoanalytic institutions, readers must study some of his major books to understand them. In the middle and arguably the most controversial section of his book, Gedo details his side of the problems in the relationship with Heinz Kohut which culminated in a difficult break with the self psychology group over the Casebook. Gedo had initiated this book but later withdrew from after a major fight with another member of the group working together on the book. Kohut told Gedo that his withdrawal over the crisis amounted to his 'declaration of independence'. 'My rupture with Kohut', Gedo writes, 'was the most difficult contingency of my adult life, there was no turning back to a pre-Kohutian safe haven and I felt my intellectual isolation keenly' (p. 173). Thereafter, Gedo took a 'solitary path' (p. 174) and saw himself in the terms of his much respected Boston colleague Arnold Modell as 'a school of one', a position adopted by every serious contributor to contemporary psychoanalysis in Modell's view. This is certainly a 'warts and all' memoir which is an accurate expression of Gedo's passion, intelligence and wit. This is a controversial book; there is much that many would disagree with in it, especially with Gedo's accounts of Kohut and self psychology. Nevertheless, anybody who knows John Gedo appreciates the unique combination of passion and brilliance that makes him someone worth listening to no matter how much one might disagree with him. Gedo has had the courage to put it all down, saving no-one, not even himself. This book comprises rich and engrossing slices of the last fifty years of American psychoanalytic politics and history, of institutional and professional analytic life, by one of the leading theorists and dissidents in American psychoanalysis.

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. fascinating insider's look at the world of psychoanalysis
By A Customer
This book was great fun to read. Gedo is a marvelous writer, and has lived a most interesting life. The book is autobiographical, focusing primarily on his life as a psychoanalyst. He gives an insider's look at the Chicago psychoanalytic scene over a number of decades, with special emphasis on his conflicts with Heinz Kohut. As Gedo becomes better known, he travels more and more widely, so especially in the later chapters there are many interesting stories about his encounters with psychoanalysts outside of Chicago, including ones living in France, Germany, Italy and various other countries. My biggest frustration was with Gedo's self-imposed limitation on discussions of theoretical matters. For instance, in his conflicts with Kohut one gets a wealth of

fascinating details about the personal side of the conflict, but only very brief statements of the theoretical issues involved. Gedo is always careful to supply references, so an interested reader can certainly find and read the relevant books and articles. But for me it was frustrating, and this limitation on full discussion of theoretical issues makes Gedo's conflicts and struggles seem almost entirely a matter of a conflict of personalities, when in fact there were (as Gedo states) issues of great importance and interest involved. Although I have met some of the people that Gedo writes about (Heinz Kohut, for example), I really didn't know any of them well enough to be in a position to judge how fair and accurate his portrayals of them are. But they are never dull. Gedo came across to me as a brilliant, highly cultured, highly principled man, with high standards for himself and others, but also a man that many found quite difficult. I would have loved to have had the chance to meet him myself. 4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Spleen, Venom, and Hatred By A Customer John Gedo's latest work attempts to describe the causes of his isolation from the main currents of psychoanalysis, and from its centers of power. His writing also strives to argue for the primacy and intellectual supremacy of his own psychoanalytic "model" and techniques. The book ended up being one that evoked great pity and sadness in this reader. Gedo's writing became an endless litany of rageful arrogance--- often against those very persons who had once helped him, as well as against colleagues and mentors long dead and unable to defend themselves. Very few of his professional acquaintances escape the wrath of his (seeming) narcissistic rage in this book. One of Dr. Gedo's last observations in the book was that one of his alleged remaining personal difficulties is that he is still too modest, unable to forcefully assert his own true worth. In the face of the ever-present grandiosity and haughtiness in this book's writing, Dr. Gedo's comment seems to reveal the tragic extent of a major limitation to his own self-awareness. I would rate the book a "7" as a Vanity-Fair level tabloid memoir, a "9" for provoking me to a good amount of introspection, for an overall rating of "8".

John Gedo, Kohut's heir apparent, chose principle over power when he broke with the self psychology movement to argue for an empirically rigorous, biologically based psychoanalysis. Dr. Gedo brings the sensibility of a Central European intellectual to this memoir of the North American psychoanalytic scene of the past fifty years. He portrays psychoanalysis at its peak, when the discipline commanded academic and popular respect and analysts headed every major department of psychiatry. Telling also of insularity, orthodoxy, guru-making, and self-serving blindness, Gedo shows how things went awry when psychoanalysis failed to face the complexity of its task and retreated to schismatic conflicts; his jeremiad, equally unsparing of himself and his colleagues, indicts the policies and procedures that threaten to destroy psychoanalysis today. Throughout John Gedo's often very personal odyssey is an accessible presentation of his substantial intellectual work - a complex, scientifically grounded theory of human development, clinical technique, and psychoanalytic change.

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