

THE REALITY OF THE OBJECT AND ECONOMIC POINT OF VIEW¹

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Freud's work may seem baffling inasmuch as certain of its elements appear to have been inspired from almost mystical sources—particularly when he postulates that we retain the memory of primeval events and images, such as the primal scene, parricide, images of castrating and devouring parents, and of animals predatory upon man. (We think it equally necessary to postulate, as in animal psychology, the existence in our memory of patterns of satisfying objects, i.e. parents as protectors, givers of food, sexual partners, etc.) On the other hand those postulates which deal with the economic distribution of instinctual drives, or the quantity of instinctual energy, seem to reveal basically mechanistic convictions. In this short paper our aim is to justify the coexistence of these two concepts in psycho-analytic theory, and to demonstrate that, widely different as they are, they are structurally interdependent. It seems to us that many of Freud's successors, by not retaining the two concepts at the same time, have limited and distorted their theoretical outlook, even if the value of their clinical contributions has not been thereby diminished.

The psycho-analyst must faithfully record *all* aspects of psychic reality. For example, to reduce this simply to the subject himself without any reference to the real external object is to distort reality. Is not this exactly what happens, however, if the object is presented, more or less implicitly, as an emanation, a secretion or 'projection' of the subject? For this reason we feel it is important to demonstrate that the concept of atavistic memory answers to the necessity of placing the subject, as it were, simultaneously face to face with the object, right from the beginning.

If instincts are hereditary, so also is the memory of certain 'impressions from the outside' (Freud: *Moses and Monotheism*), and

perhaps even certain events which in the distant past placed us in crucial contact with our relatives or with enemies of our species. The persistence of these impressions in a potential form for which we have no mental image, but which is certainly not that of an actual psychic presence, is the very basis of our relations with others. It is like the imprint or seal of the external world upon us, the form which moulds all our subsequent ideas. If we reject this hypothesis, and in doing so (as far as it is concerned) we are being more rigorous than the least imaginative of the writers on animal psychology, it seems to us that we lock the subject up forever within his own narcissistic world. No matter how vigorously and frequently he may make projections, he is condemned to create nothing other than object-phantoms. At the same time relationships with others, cathected for their own sake, are not accounted for, nor are those relationships with the persons who play a primary role in the subject's bodily and psychic development during the first months of life, and which come into existence prior to the establishment of a differentiated ego. Thus we find ourselves led to impose upon the personality from birth a rigid and sealed mould within which many things may happen, but to which nothing can come from the outside.

And it is here that the economic viewpoint becomes important, and must be justified in its turn. The level of energy of a permanently isolated system cannot vary. But this is not the case with a system habitually in communication with the outside world, and with which contact is interrupted only at certain moments. You will no doubt recognize in this metaphor, Freud's economic view of the changing rapport between subject and object in the course of life. Sleep, secondary narcissism, and sometimes psychotic narcissism alternate with situations where discharge into the outer world is more or less

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assured. These fluctuations of energy, often considerable, explain not only such all-important phenomena as anxiety, but also far-reaching and complete dynamic redistributions as found in melancholia. In fact the normal and the pathological transformations of a subject cannot be understood if we do not bring economic factors into account. And furthermore one cannot suppose variations among these factors without having first established the reality of an object-world to be explored, which is sought for or turned away from, which frustrates or gratifies. If this world of object relationships is never there in reality, although always in appearance, the individual's life-history will be reduced simply to the successive stages of his maturation. (Development being the result of the interaction of internal [maturation] and external factors [stimulus of environment].) We might ask ourselves whether maturation can be considered otherwise than abstractly, and whether there is anything beyond a developmental history. We must therefore retain the hypothesis of perceptive hereditary patterns if we wish to conserve to the economic point of view its full meaning and fruitfulness.

We believe we cannot better apply our hypothesis than by examining from this standpoint a system of thought in which both these concepts are neglected, such as the Kleinian system. This however is only one example among many others, and if we choose this important school of thought it is by very reason of its coherence. The exactness of its internal logic shows up clearly the consequences of rejecting or abandoning Freud's basic intuitive thinking. A less consistent doctrine might escape more lightly.

Since we are in close agreement with the basis of the criticisms of Anna Freud, Melitta Schmideberg, and Edward Glover, supported by the experimental work of René Spitz, we should like to recall certain essential points of criticism to serve as a starting-point for our own thesis.

For Melanie Klein the evolution of the instincts and the ego no longer extends, as for Freud, over several years, but is limited to a matter of weeks. Moreover it is so clearly predetermined that its unfolding in time, that is to say the successive metamorphoses of the developing personality, remains fictitious. If the full-grown oak were present in the acorn, the growth of the tree would be nothing other than an illusion, but since this is obviously not the case, if we wished to deny the change in reality, we

should have to trust to imagination and disregard the dimensions, shape, and structure of the acorn. By the same reasoning, if we wish to contend that the mature adult is contained within the child, we must overlook the biological nature of behaviour in order to support a hypothetical psychological system, no part of which has been confirmed by direct observation. René Spitz, for example, among the very large number of children he studied, found no signs which might be interpreted as the experience of a 'central depressive position'.

On examining the Kleinian system from the structural point of view, we find that the differentiation between the unconscious and the conscious is lost, the unconscious being verbalized, and the conscious retaining all the instinctual rawness of the unconscious. The superego, on the other hand, being differentiated much too precociously, cannot be located in this psychic structure which has neither top, bottom, nor centre.

The real attitude of the object towards the child, and the significance of events which affect him, is recognized verbally, but in fact neglected.

Finally, aggression encroaches on libido to the point of being considered as the sole generator of anxiety, regression, and progress.

If, leaving aside for the moment the problem of phantasy, we attempt to draw conclusions from these surprising interpretations of behaviour in the first months of life, we must admit that they tend to turn the normal baby, not only into an older, neurotic child, but also into a psychotic adult, by endowing him with the elaborated products of unconscious processes which manifest themselves spontaneously only in psychoses and in nightmares.

In this instantaneous recapitulation of the phases of instinctual evolution, along with the structural confusion, the obliteration of the object and the outside world, and the prevalence of aggression, we recognize all the features of the 'Narcissistic Neurosis' in the sense in which Freud used the term. Kleinian terminology does not contradict this idea, and it is further supported by the interest which this school takes in the psychoses and the successful unravelling of their contents. These considerations would suffice to illustrate that there is no room for the real object in this system, were it not that the object figures so often in their writings. We would therefore do well to examine the Kleinian concept of the object. To summarize briefly: from birth the subject must protect himself from his

own destructive drives by turning them against his mother. Purely by a process of projection she then becomes a terrifying figure, not in relation to the degree of frustration which she imposes upon him—for normal and inevitable frustration alone is referred to in these writings—but in relation to the child's own innate aggression. The object is no more than a prop, since everything which defines it and animates it is drawn from the subject. Introjection becomes a simple return to the sender.

The problem of the good object appears at first sight more thorny, but basically it is identical. Here the accent is placed upon gratification viewed from the subjective side of the relationship. The object is defined by nothing more than the subject's need of the object, or the love he has for it. Since on the other hand the degree of satisfaction received is not taken into account, this makes the mother's positive contribution a constant and unvarying factor, and as a consequence, negligible from the economic point of view. Since she neither frustrates nor satisfies to a greater or lesser degree, it is as though she were not there.

An object in the sense in which we use the term must be defined by its real and perceptible qualities (shape and colour, sounds, smells, etc.), by its real and perceptible intentions and by its real action upon the subject. We believe we can uphold the statement that in the Kleinian theory there are only pseudo-objects.

It may be said that we reproach Melanie Klein for not acknowledging the existence of the object from the first months, whereas Freud did exactly the same. It is part of classical theory to accept that the object, recognized as such, is only arrived at later, in correlation with the development of the ego.

To reply to this we must remember that according to Freud, and in contradiction to the thought of Melanie Klein, the object can affect the subject before he has formed the least idea of it. It is evident that the mother plays a role of prime importance in the supply of energy and in the dynamics of the child's development during the long months before she is discerned by him, even in a fragmentary fashion. There is scarcely any doubt of the psychic absence of the object at that time. We must distinguish very carefully between a non-existent image, and an image which may exist in the unconscious.

If Melanie Klein claims that 'object phantasies' exist in the new-born child, it is because she believes it possible to lay the basis of object

relations by tracing them back to the first weeks of life. This is an error because (the infant's narcissism preventing psychic relationships with the outside world) it would mean attributing to the child certain images which can represent nothing other than the very needs of the nursling, since his perceptive system is not yet mature, and atavistic perceptions are neglected. The external world which is thus brought into being entirely from within the subject will always bear the mark of its origin. It will remain on the inside. What is more serious, it will always stand between the real world and the being who has produced it. In this way object relations are abolished where one sought to establish them. These hypothetical 'object phantasies' are only potential projections, and instead of being the impression of the outside world, are its unique source. Images are projected by the mirror and are taken for the reality of which they are but the reflection. The subject at the same time is shut in forever with one or several virtual objects which separate him from real objects.

For this reason, significant quantitative variations in instinctual energy can no longer be attributed to external factors. Besides, so far as we know, energetic variations of endogenous origin have little place in the Kleinian system. However, as we have already recalled, there is no important dynamic change which is not linked with significant change in the psychic economy. If this is considered to be practically invariable, one can certainly, like the Kleinians, identify—with a few insignificant variations—melancholia in an adult with the 'depressive position' of the normal nursling. This would entail a refusal to take into account the vast difference between the two situations from the economic point of view. This difference is largely dependent upon the nature of the contact with the object—very close in the case of the newborn child, and practically non-existent in that of the mentally ill patient.

The theory of hereditary perceptive patterns does not reduce us to such an extremity. Mention should be made here of Szekely's interesting hypothesis. He strives to justify the existence of a precocious 'paranoid phase' by interpreting the smile of the three to eight months old baby when he looks directly into a human face, as the overcoming of a fear of a menacing oculo-naso-frontal pattern. René Spitz has rightly contradicted Szekely with arguments based upon his experimental work. We would like to add that the importance of the theory of hereditary

patterns is that it renders superfluous during the when neither child nor sign which could be sh these patterns. In ad thesis could be justifi danger the theory of p 'paranoid position'. V the newborn child ability, which in any ca does not correspond t between his physio-ana of an older child or a of each of these patter attainment of a certain a certain degree of in presence of more or les For this reason it is r that they are already hidden in the depths o Moreover, this hypoth object, gives it its found with certain inherited world which he does n he recalls, and which create simply from w nothing else by a serie but a world he will cor

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patterns is that it renders their pre-supposition superfluous during the early evolutionary phases when neither child nor animal demonstrates any sign which could be shown to be connected with these patterns. In addition, if Szekely's hypothesis could be justified, it would greatly endanger the theory of projection contained in the 'paranoid position'. We have no need to endow the newborn child with precocious mental ability, which in any case is not perceptible, and does not correspond to the obvious difference between his physio-anatomical structure and that of an older child or an adult. The appearance of each of these patterns is subordinated to the attainment of a certain level of maturation, to a certain degree of inner tension, and to the presence of more or less specific external stimuli. For this reason it is not necessary to suppose that they are already there in an active sense, hidden in the depths of a remote personal past. Moreover, this hypothesis, far from effacing the object, gives it its foundation. The child is born with certain inherited instinctual drives into a world which he does not yet perceive but which he recalls, and which later he will not have to create simply from within himself and from nothing else by a series of chance discoveries, but a world he will come to *recognize*.

It is now time to examine the consequences of this concept of the object denuded of its reality, and the retention of energy which must follow. We do not know if readers of the Kleinian texts have been struck, as we have been, by the asexual character revealed in their psychic productions. There is never anything other than the wish to destroy, the fear of being destroyed, the need to repair what has been destroyed, and the need to seek and be assured of protection against destruction. The fact that the breast and the penis are, anatomically, sex organs appears to confer upon them nothing of an erotic nature. They are organs to bite, crush, lacerate, or expel. Marc Schlumberger, in an unpublished observation, long ago drew our attention to the rigorous desexualization of associative content in remarks of this kind.

In general the fundamental observations are based upon either serious infantile neuroses or psychoses. We are not surprised therefore to discover the results of decathecting the object

for the benefit of the ego, with consequent de-libidization, and the release of destructive impulses. An increase in unbound energy of an aggressive kind is a threat to the subject. He has two ways of warning his defence system—pure anxiety, with which we are not here concerned, and the *evocation of images* suitable to contain the instinctual upsurge while fixating it. We may recall here that this is the primary function of the dream, and *mutatis mutandis*, of the phobic reaction also. Watching this process take place in a child of two, or in an adult of thirty, does not allow us to project it onto the past beyond the moment at which it manifests itself. In fact it is quite possible that the conditions necessary to its appearance have not been found in conjunction before, since this phenomenon, however frequently it may appear, is not thereby less pathological, and can manifest itself at any age as the original effect of an original situation.

These 'phantasies', aroused by the ego instincts, are not pre-genital. It would be more exact to describe them as extra-genital, since they occur on the fringe of the oral and genital phases. These images, which are presented as evidence of a libidinal regression, are for this reason unacceptable. Anna Freud, Serge Lebovici, René Diatkine have all established the role of defence in phantasy in the Freudian sense. Our work, in certain respects complementary to theirs, tends to illustrate the role of defence by images of the object—the component elements of real phantasy. The 'images of the object' are only the expression of a defence which, though it may reunite us with the most remote past of our species, in no way permits us to reconstruct without proof from its plastic shapes our short individual past. Freud always strove to maintain an equal emphasis on the internal and the external factors in psychic events, as he also did between each of the two groups of instincts. This intellectual equilibrium protects us from solipsism and similarly from materialistic deviation. We have tried to demonstrate here that it is not without difficulty that one can give preference to the first of the two factors in the subject-object relationship. Let us conclude, however, by pointing out that the opposite point of view is equally open to criticism.