

ANXIETY AND ITS VICISSITUDES

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The repeated attempts that have been made to improve humanity—in particular to make it more peaceable—have failed, because nobody has understood the full depth and vigor of the instincts of aggression innate in each individual. Such efforts do not seek to do more than encourage the positive, well-wishing impulses of the person while denying or suppressing his aggressive ones. And so they have been doomed to failure from the beginning. But psychoanalysis has different means at its disposal for a task of this kind. It cannot, it is true, altogether do away with man's aggressive instinct as such; but it can, by diminishing anxiety which accentuates those instincts, break up the mutual reinforcement that is going on all the time between his hatred and his fear.¹

Anxiety in the Historical Context of Psychoanalysis

Freud's initial theory of anxiety was inherently from his study of hysteria. He considered anxiety to emerge from traumatic roots. He said several things about anxiety following his jump to libido theory from seduction theory but it wasn't until his publication of *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* in 1926 that we get to see a full-fledged account of anxiety from Freud. This and the previous publication of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* are two of the primary sources from which Melanie Klein started her work.

Klein immediately absorbed the concept of death drive² from Freud and made it central to her theoretical framework. It is to be noted that it was already visible in Klein's works on how she understands and emphasizes the aggression among human beings, as the very first quote of this paper shows. Klein considered her theory of anxiety to be directly built and extended from those of Freud and Abraham. In her *Theory of Anxiety and Guilt*, Klein acknowledges Abraham for his introduction of cannibalistic desires in relation to anxiety and guilt:

Abraham thus contributed materially to our understanding of the origins of anxiety and guilt, since he was the first to point out the connection of anxiety and guilt with cannibalistic desires.³

Freud originally had the concept of "anxiety neurosis" which he introduced in one of his early papers⁴. In this paper Freud gives two specific aetiologies for anxiety neurosis, which is nicely summarized here:

- the accumulation of sexual tension

¹ Klein, M. (1921). The Early Development of Conscience in the Child. *Love, Guilt and Reparation*, 248.

² Freud, S. (1920) Beyond the Pleasure Principle. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud 18:1-64

³ Klein, M. (1957). On the Theory of Anxiety and Guilt. *Envy and Gratitude and other Works*, 1946-1963.

⁴ Freud, S. (1894) On The Grounds for Detaching a Particular Syndrome From Neurasthenia Under The Description 'Anxiety Neurosis'. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud 3:85-115

- the absence or insufficiency of a 'psychical working-over' of the somatic sexual excitation, which can only be transformed into 'psychical libido' on condition that it be connected to pre-established groups of sexual ideas. When the sexual excitation is not controlled in this way it is deflected directly on to the somatic plane, where it manifests itself in the form of anxiety.⁵

This theory of anxiety went long enough for Freud, until he did the Little Hans⁶ case, and afterwards following Stekel⁷ he introduced the concept of "anxiety hysteria" which is different from the former by virtue of its phobic nature and there being a "substitute object" for the anxiety. And it is not of as much importance to what the current paper tries to explain. Then much later in 1926⁸ Freud returned to the central problem of anxiety and made several new additions to it. As he writes:

I propose to assemble quite impartially, all the facts that we know about anxiety without expecting to arrive at a fresh synthesis.⁹

In this monograph, one of the main conclusions he arrived at was that of the ego being the "seat of anxiety" as the aetiology of anxiety:

The problem of how anxiety arises in connection with repression may be no simple one; but we may legitimately hold firmly to the idea that the ego is the actual seat of anxiety and give up our earlier view that the catexic energy of the repressed impulse is automatically turned into anxiety.¹⁰

And this is from where Klein starts her own theoretical position on anxiety. She further goes on to make anxiety the very core of her theory, as she says to differentiate her work from that of Fairbairn:

Fairbairn's approach was largely from the angle of ego-development in relation to objects, while mine was predominantly from the angle of *anxieties and their vicissitudes*.¹¹

Differences with Freud

Even though Klein was building on top of Freudian conceptualization of death drive and anxiety, nonetheless there were specific deviations. One of those deviations were around the origin of primary anxiety and whether one can talk about the "fear of death". Freud in the same monograph said:

the unconscious seems to contain nothing that could give any content to our concept of the annihilation of life.¹²

Thus Freud doesn't believe that there is anything in the unconscious where we can find a fear of annihilation of life. Klein disagrees on this, she says:

⁵ Laplanche, Jean. & Pontalis, J.-B. (1973). *The language of psycho-analysis*. London : Hogarth Press. Entry for "anxiety hysteria".

⁶ Little Hans

⁷ Stekel, Wilhelm. (1908). *Nervöse Angstzustände und ihre Behandlung (Neurotic Anxiety-States and their Treatment)*. Berlin-Wien: Urban and Schwarzenberg. Freud wrote a foreword to this book.

⁸ Freud, S. (1926) *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud 20:75-176

⁹ *Ibid*, p.132

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.140

¹¹ Klein, M. (1946) *Some Notes on Schizoid Mechanisms. Envy and Gratitude and Other Works*. 15

¹² (Freud, 1926) p.129

I would also think that if we assume the existence of a death instinct, we must also assume that in the deepest layers of the mind there is a response to this instinct in the form of fear of annihilation of life.¹³

¹³ (Klein, 1957) p.38

And this, she goes on to say, would be the first cause of anxiety. Moreover, inline with what she said about aggression in human beings, she confirmed that this source of anxiety is never eliminated and persists throughout life and is an ever-present factor in all anxiety-situations¹⁴

¹⁴ Ibid, p.38

Guilt: Is it the Super-Ego or the Death Drive?

In one of her early significant papers titled *A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States* Klein differentiated between two main forms of anxiety: persecutory anxiety and depressive anxiety¹⁵. But before going for the two forms of anxiety, we'd have to understand the relationship between guilt and anxiety in Klein and with some other concepts (love and reparation).

¹⁵ Though Klein admits in the same paper and later in *Theory of Anxiety and Guilt* that the difference between the two forms isn't entirely explicit and clear-cut.

Guilt has been mostly considered by Freud as something that happens *after* the Oedipus complex, parallel to the development of a conscience which in turn is the result of super-ego development. Abraham added to this by following his previous theory of anxiety and cannibalistic desires, and proposed that guilt arises in the earlier anal-sadistic stage of psychosexual development¹⁶. Abraham didn't say much on the relationship between anxiety and guilt.

¹⁶ Abraham, K. A short study of the development of the libido. In Frankiel, R.V. (Ed) (1994). *Essential papers on object loss*, New York: New York University Press

Coming to Klein, in one of her early papers she tells us about how guilt can arise in the child from its attack on the "internal objects". From the aforementioned paper there's a brilliant quote which exemplifies this perfectly:

In attacking its mother's inside, therefore, the child is attacking a great number of objects, and is embarking on a course which is fraught with consequences. The womb first stands for the world; and the child originally approaches this world with desires to attack and destroy it, and is therefore prepared from the outset to view the real, external world as more or less hostile to itself, and peopled with objects ready to make attacks upon it. Its belief that in thus attacking its mother's body it has also attacked its father and its brothers and sisters, and in a wider sense the whole world, is, in my experience, one of the underlying causes of its sense of guilt, and one of the development of its social and moral feelings in general.¹⁷

¹⁷ (Klein, 1921) p.254

Here we can see clearly how a sense of guilt, for Klein, arises from a very early stage due to its roots in the inherent aggression of the child. And as we've said before the aggression is of course due to the death drive itself. She further says how this leads to "making good" the damage the child thinks it has done. She continues:

For when the excessive severity of the super-ego has become somewhat lessened, its visitations upon the ego on account of those imaginary attacks induce feelings of guilt which arouse strong tendencies in the child to make good the imaginary damage it has done to its objects.

Forms of Anxiety and Their Relationship to Guilt

As we said in the last section, Klein differentiates persecutory anxiety and depressive anxiety. This is very much in parallel to the two well-known Kleinian positions: paranoid-schizoid position and the depressive position. Where does guilt come into all of this? The answer is depressive anxiety. In the following section we try to make sense of how each of these is related to each other and work together in relation to the processes of love and reparation.

Klein's persecutory anxiety is inherently paranoid, in contrast to the depressive. Persecutory anxiety is directly an extension of the understanding Klein has of "fear of annihilation" due to the death drive. Thus this form of anxiety is mostly related to the annihilation of the ego. It is also characteristic of a need to love and introject a good object, but it instead makes the anxiety much more complicated. This is explained in the following quote:

In my experience there is, furthermore, a deep anxiety as to the dangers which await the object inside the ego. It cannot be safely maintained there, as the inside is felt to be a dangerous and poisonous place in which the loved object would perish. Here we see [...] the situation, namely, when the ego becomes fully identified with its good internalized objects, and at the same time becomes aware of its own incapacity to protect and preserve them against the internalized persecuting objects and the id.¹⁸

¹⁸ (Klein, 1934), p.265

Depressive anxiety on the other hand is mostly related to the harm that can be or is done to internal *and* external objects by the child's destructive impulses. And it is here that we find guilt coming into play. Not only anxiety but actually a much more rich synthesis:

... the basis of depressive anxiety is the synthesis between destructive impulses and feelings of love towards *one* object. ¹⁹

¹⁹ (Klein, 1957) p.45

Thus there's a state during integration, for Klein, when a "synthesis" between love and hatred to (partial) objects leads to a number of things such as: depressive anxiety, guilt and reparation of the attacked object. This makes depressive anxiety a more "mature" aspect of integration, in comparison to persecutory anxiety. This "maturity" isn't a sign that destructive impulses are vanishing and the subject now has more of love for the object, but rather in depressive anxiety the subject is allowing for much more ambivalence to be part of it.

And guilt arises from this allowance of destructive impulses which the subject feels is going to harm the loved object. But as we said, in this ambivalence the subject also has an urge to undo the harm done by the destructive impulses. This tendency to undo the harm, is a consequence of the guilt.

Now it is only fair to ask, is guilt inherently an element of depressive anxiety or is there something else that brings guilt into play? Klein humbly admits (in *Theory of Anxiety and Guilt*) to not have a definite answer to this but rather:

I would suggest that depressive anxiety, guilt and the reparative urge are often experienced simultaneously.²⁰

²⁰ Ibid

So we can't say if guilt *arises* from depressive anxiety or vice-versa, but we can only say that they seem to coexist along with reparation. This makes up for one of the hallmarks of "true" or "effective" reparation in Klein, we'll come back to this in a later section.

As we had said earlier Klein doesn't really draw clean lines between the two forms of anxiety. She already admits that even in the earliest forms of object relations you can find some part of depressive anxiety and guilt²¹. But that said, she nonetheless gives a clean account of the relationship between the two. She describes a particular situation which helps us understand the differentiation:

²¹ Ibid, p.43

during a particular session a patient may suffer from strong feelings of guilt and despair about his incapacity to restore the damage which he feels he has caused. Then a complete change occurs: the patient suddenly brings up material of a persecutory kind. The analyst and analysis are accused of doing nothing but harm, grievances which lead back to early frustrations are voiced.²²

²² Ibid, p.46

This could be seen as a very typical situation when dealing with patients of severe personality disorders, such as BPD (Borderline Personality Disorder). In these patients there's a deeply ambivalent and problematic condition between love and aggression leading to splitting behaviors such as idealization and a persecutory demarcation of the same object. Klein continues with a neat summary of the situation:

Persecutory anxiety has become dominant, the feeling of guilt has receded, and with it the love for the object seems to have disappeared. In this altered emotional situation, the object has turned bad, cannot be loved, and therefore destructive impulses towards it seem justified. This means that persecutory anxiety and defenses *have been reinforced* in order to escape from the overwhelming burden of guilt and despair.

This neatly sums up how the difficult coexistence of the two forms of anxiety looks like and also, as Klein says, the differentiation of the two always helps us understand the process we are trying to analyse.

Anxiety amidst Love, Hate and Reparation

Reparation as a concept has been used by Klein in three varieties:

- manic reparation
- obsessional reparation
- reparation proper

As we saw earlier reparation (proper) is the consequence of a sense of guilt coexisting with depressive anxiety. But not every form of reparation is as clean as that. We have the above two distinct deviations from reparation proper.

Manic Reparation

Manic reparation is characterised by an early stage of omnipotence in the child. Omnipotence directed primarily towards protecting the ego, from persecutory objects. Manic reparation leads to a vicious cycle which only further damages the object, instead of any effective reparation. During the depressive position, the loved objects might appear as so deeply damaged that this creates the sense of guilt for his omnipotent phantasies. But the urge to repair that arises as a consequence against such a vastly damaged object is seen as exhausting, and the subject now goes on to belittle the task of reparation and think as if it can be “accomplished by magic”²³.

²³ 2011 Spillius, E. et al The New Dictionary of Kleinian Thought. Routledge.

Obsessional Reparation

Early in her works, Klein saw the urge to make restitution among obsessional neurotics as a mode of dealing with anxiety and guilt. These urges are also omnipotent in nature, as the previous ones were. In one of her chapters to *The Psychoanalysis of Children*²⁴ she writes:

By virtue of the mechanism of displacement on to something very small the obsessional patient can seek in very slight achievements a proof of his constructive omnipotence and his capacity to make complete restitution.²⁵

²⁴ Klein, M. (1932) The Relations Between Obsessional Neurosis and the Early Stages of the Super-Ego. *The Psychoanalysis of Children*.

²⁵ Ibid

So in obsessional reparation we see this “self-fulfilling” prophecy the subject has about its ability to make restitution *completely* on the basis of very slight changes. But this view isn’t stable enough, he soon has inevitable doubts in his “constructive omnipotence” and this leads to an incentive of repeating his actions until he has found another slight change to be sure of his capacity to make complete restitution.

Reparation (proper)

Reparation as a try to “undo” things and restore the loved object was seen by Klein in her early writings on *Criminal tendencies in normal children*:

The impression I get of the way in which even the quite small child fights his unsocial tendencies is rather touching. . . One moment after we have seen the most sadistic impulses, we meet with performances showing the greatest capacity for love and wish to make all possible sacrifices to be loved.²⁶

²⁶ Klein, M. (1927) *Criminal Tendencies in Normal Children, The Psychoanalysis of Children*. 191

Reparation if it doesn't take the above two forms, is an integral part of the depressive position. It is not excessively omnipotent in its urge to repair, it is “grounded in love and respect for the separate other” and it involves going through loss and damage to have one's objects restored. Unlike the above two, reparation promotes virtuous cycles in states of depression and Klein also considered it to be a big part of how one does creative work. This is the best Klein gets into explaining how intimately (depressive) anxiety, guilt, love and hate are tied to each other. It is through reparation. She explains in her essay titled *Love, Guilt and Reparation*, even in the small child you can see not only a concern due to dependence but also an urge to make sacrifices.

Side by side with the destructive impulses in the unconscious mind both of the child and of the adult, there exists a profound urge to make sacrifices, in order to help and to put right loved people who in phantasy have been harmed or destroyed. In the depths of the mind, the urge to make people happy is linked up with a strong feeling of responsibility and concern for them, which manifests itself in genuine sympathy with other people and in the ability to understand them, as they are and as they feel.²⁷

²⁷ Klein, M. & Riviere, J., *Love, Guilt and Reparation. Love, Hate and Reparation*. 65-66

Anxiety and Ego Integration

In all of object relations, ego integration is one of the central aspects of the theoretical framework. Be that in Winnicott with the transitional phenomena or in Fairbairn with the central ego. Klein seems to have a much more complicated take on the integration of ego, than of the former two. She says this pretty directly:

I see the formation of the ego as an entity to be largely determined by the alternation between splitting and repression on the one hand, and integration in relation to objects on the other.²⁸

²⁸ Klein, M. *On the Development of Mental Functioning*.

One can understand this by thinking of the infant's development towards the depressive position, where the subject sees the objects

and its own self in a much more integrated manner. This comes as no surprises to the fact that for Klein, depressive position's characteristic features is the capacity for integration. The following paragraph from *Envy and Gratitude* really makes clear what ego integration in Klein looks like in the context of clinical analysis and its aims:

In analysis we should make our way slowly and gradually towards the painful insight into the divisions in the patient's self. This means that the destructive sides are again and again split off and regained, until greater integration comes about. As a result, the feeling of responsibility becomes stronger, and guilt and depression are fully experienced. When this happens, the ego is strengthened, omnipotence of destructive impulses is diminished. . . and the capacity for love and gratitude, stifled in the course of splitting processes, is released. . . By helping the patient to achieve a better integration of his self, [analysis] aims at a mitigation of hatred by love.²⁹

²⁹ Klein, M. (1957) *Envy and Gratitude. Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963*

The above passage also reiterates the significance of repeated splitting *and* repression along with allowing for experience of guilt and depression. This should be indicative of the fact that for Klein integration is never a *positivistic* notion, nothing where the ego "learns" to dominate the id or the destructive impulses for their eradication. Rather the Kleinian integration is in enhancing the ego's capacity for allowing splitting and integrating from the splits. This paragraph also indicates how love might be a necessary condition for the capacity of the ego to integrate. Love which allows the infant to move into the depressive position. We see the precise opposite happen in the paranoid-schizoid position. This Klein explains:

result in the feeling that the ego is in bits. This feeling amounts to a state of disintegration. In normal development the states of disintegration which the infant experiences are transitory. Among other factors, gratification by the external good object again and again helps to break through these schizoid states.³⁰

³⁰ Klein, M. (1946) *Some Notes on Schizoid Mechanisms. Envy and Gratitude and Other Works. 20*

And this repeated trials to break from the schizoid states mark the development towards the more integrative depressive position. Going back to our previous point, this means that integration with itself to have more love and less destructive impulses. The ego that's "strong enough" embraces both ambivalence and difference. And as we've said before for Klein the ambivalence of Eros with death drive is never finished, it stays throughout the life of the subject and thus the integration of the ego is never "complete" but always in a process towards it. This last quote finally sums up almost everything about Kleinian integration in all its richness and complexity:

With the introjection of the complete object in about the second quarter of the first year marked steps in integration are made. This implies

important changes in the relation to objects. The loved and hated aspects of the mother are no longer felt to be so widely separated, and the result is an *increased* fear of loss, states akin to mourning and a strong feeling of guilt, because the aggressive impulses are felt to be directed against the loved object. The depressive position has come to the fore. The very experience of depressive feelings in turn has the effect of further integrating the ego, because it makes for an increased understanding of psychic reality and better perception of the external world, as well as for a greater synthesis between inner and external situations.³¹

Conclusion

In the above pages, I have tried to give a brief introduction to various aspects of how significant anxiety is in Klein's corpus. Beyond that, it was also my goal to reiterate how central anxiety as a concept is, to all of psychoanalysis before and beyond Klein. In summary, one can say that for Klein anxiety is inherently tied in a complex relationship to guilt, hatred, love and reparation. It is not only inevitable for integration to even take place, but its irredeemably present from the very beginning of the infant's life³². This is only scratching the surface of the many ways anxiety works in Klein, its relation to aesthetics, sublimation and other subjects that haven't been touched by the current paper. Nonetheless I hope this paper has been helpful in encouraging the reader both to go back to anxiety and to rethink its place in Klein³³.

³¹ Klein, M. (1946) Some Notes on Schizoid Mechanisms. *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works*. 14

³² Thanks to Freud for death drive!

³³ This paper was presented as first in a series of presentations done around the concept of Anxiety in the *Psychoanalytique Bites!* community.