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# An analysis of Melanie Klein's "The Psychoanalysis of Children"

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An analysis of Melanie Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* (London: Vintage, 1997).

By Peter Harris, The University of Manchester

## Catalogue Text

An analysis of Melanie Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* (London: Vintage, 1997).

By Peter Harris, The University of Manchester

Melanie Klein was one of the founding figures of psychoanalysis and her influence on the field is now felt worldwide. *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* is a classic, pioneering text of child psychoanalysis and a seminal text in the foundation of object relations theory. It is her first major theoretical work, and a result of her substantial clinical experience in applying psychoanalytic theory to both young and older children. Contrary to the established orthodoxy at the time, Klein claimed that it was possible to apply psychoanalysis to children as well as adults. She recognised the centrality of the infant's first relationships with its primary caregivers and outlined the early mental processes that build up a person's inner emotional world. The book led to a greater understanding of children's emotional and sexual development, and continues to influence the practice of a wide range of professionals working with children.

## Key quotes from the original text

1. "Analysis can do for children, whether normal or neurotic, all that it can do for adults, and much more. It can spare the child the many miseries and painful experiences which the adult goes through before he comes to be analysed; and its therapeutic prospects go beyond those of adult analyses. The experience of the last few years has given me and other child analysts good grounds for believing that psychoses and psychotic traits, malformations of character, asocial behaviour, grave obsessional neuroses and inhibitions of development can be cured while the individual is still young ... If every child who shows disturbances that are at all severe were to be analysed in good time, a great number of people who later end up in prisons or mental hospitals, or who go completely to pieces, would be saved from such a fate and be able to develop a normal life. If child analysis can accomplish a work of this kind – and there are many indications that it can – it would be the means not only of helping the individual but of doing incalculable service to society as a whole."
2. "In thus affecting the factors that underlie a faulty development as a whole, analysis also lays the foundations for the unimpeded development of the child's future sexual life and personality."
3. "For instance, when Rita, who was a very ambivalent child, felt a resistance she at once wanted to leave the room, and I had to make an interpretation immediately so as to resolve the resistance. As soon as I had clarified for her the cause of the resistance – always carrying it back to its original object and situation – it was resolved, and she would become friendly and trustful again and continue playing, supplying in its various details a confirmation of the interpretation I had just given."
4. "Through play the child turns the experience it has passively endured into an active one and changes unpleasure into pleasure by giving its originally unpleasurable experience a happy ending."
5. "Psychoanalytic investigation has thrown much less light on the psychology of women than that of men."
6. "It is difficult, as I know from my own experience, to bring oneself to recognize that such an abhorrent idea answers to the truth."

*The Psycho-Analysis of Children* was written by Melanie Klein, first in German as *Die Psychoanalyse des Kindes* in 1932, before being translated into English by Alix Strachey.<sup>1</sup> Strachey and Klein discussed the translation in detail before its publication in English in the same year. It represents Melanie Klein's first major work in the field of psychoanalysis.<sup>2</sup> In the book, Klein, in a challenge to some contemporary thought, claimed that it was possible to apply psychoanalysis to children as well as adults, by analysing how children play.

Melanie Klein was born into a middle-class Jewish family in Vienna in 1882. She originally intended to attend medical school to study psychiatry like her father, but instead married at the age of 21 and had three children. She consequently received no formal university education and moved into the professional field of psychoanalysis later in life. Deprivations and traumatic events in her own childhood (two of her siblings died at young ages) seem to have affected her greatly.<sup>3</sup> Klein was unhappy in her marriage from the beginning, but divorce was difficult in the early 1900s and she was dependent on her husband, Arthur, for financial support.<sup>4</sup>

Klein and her family moved to Budapest in 1910 but they had to leave as the anti-Semitic "White Terror"<sup>5</sup> took hold of Hungary. She eventually joined Karl Abraham's<sup>6</sup> Psychoanalytic Institute in Berlin in 1922, by which time her marriage was failing, and Melanie and Arthur divorced in 1923. In 1924, she began her own analysis with Abraham but he died 18 months later. In 1926, Klein was invited to England by Ernest Jones<sup>7</sup> to give a series of lectures that would form the basis of her first book, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*. She

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<sup>1</sup> Alix Strachey (1892–1973) was an American-born British psychoanalyst who was instrumental in arranging Klein's first visit to London in 1925. He translated some of her papers into English.

<sup>2</sup> Psychoanalysis: Psychoanalysis is a therapeutic method, originated by Sigmund Freud, for treating mental disorders by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the patient's mind and bringing repressed fears and conflicts into the conscious mind, using techniques such as dream interpretation and free association. (*OED*)

<sup>3</sup> Catalina Bronstein, *Kleinian Theory: A Contemporary Perspective* (London: Whurr, 2001), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Bronstein, *Kleinian Theory*.

<sup>5</sup> White Terror: The "White Terror" in Hungary was a two-year period (1919–1921) of repressive violence by counter-revolutionary soldiers, with the intent of crushing any vestige of Hungary's brief communist state. Many of its victims were Jewish.

<sup>6</sup> Karl Abraham (1877–1925) was an early and important German psychoanalyst and a collaborator of Sigmund Freud. He founded the Berlin Society of Psychoanalysis in 1910 and was Melanie Klein's analyst from 1924 to 1925.

<sup>7</sup> Alfred Ernest Jones (1879–1958) was a British psychoanalyst and Sigmund Freud's official biographer. He was the first English-speaking psychoanalyst, founded the British Psychoanalytical Society in 1919 and was its president in the 1920s and 1930s.

settled in London and, with encouragement from colleagues, her work as a child psychoanalyst expanded. Klein later reported this period (between 1926 and 1938) as one of the happiest times in her life.

*The Psycho-Analysis of Children* was written during a time of turbulence in the social and political environment. This was the period of the rise of National Socialism<sup>8</sup> in 1930s Germany and Hitler's seizure of power. This political turmoil in Europe later brought contemporaries who disagreed with Klein's ideas (such as Anna Freud<sup>9</sup> and her colleagues in Vienna) to London.<sup>10</sup>

Klein brought the insights of a mother to psychoanalysis. As part of her work, she analysed the children of her colleagues and, some authors strongly believe, her own children too.<sup>11</sup> Witnessing what she believed were these children's alternating impulses of love and hate led her to develop her highly influential but also controversial theories.<sup>12</sup>

METADATA: Karl Abraham; Anna Freud; Ernest Jones; Melanie Klein, London; psychology; Vienna

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<sup>8</sup> National Socialism: National Socialism is the ideology and practice associated originally with the Nazi Party in Germany and characterised by racism and anti-Semitism.

<sup>9</sup> Anna Freud (1895–1982) was Sigmund Freud's daughter and is considered alongside Melanie Klein to be the founder of child psychology.

<sup>10</sup> Pearl King and Ricardo Steiner, eds., *The Freud–Klein Controversies (1941–45)* (London: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> Phyllis Grosskurth, *Melanie Klein: Her World and Her Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

<sup>12</sup> G. Donaldson, "Between Practice and Theory: Melanie Klein, Anna Freud and the Development of Child Analysis," *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences* 32 (1996): 162.

Before Sigmund Freud introduced his theories of the human psyche in the early 20th century, mental illness in children and adults was poorly understood. During the Middle Ages, psychological disorders were attributed to supernatural causes, and even by the 19th century, psychiatry was confined within the traditions of neuroscience and clinical medicine. The latter proposed physical, sometimes brutal, treatment for patients. Philosophy was still influenced by a dualist notion of mind and body, in which the human mind was viewed as transparent to itself: that is, as conscious only and therefore fully understandable through introspection and self-reflection.<sup>13</sup> Freud's discovery of the unconscious mind and the possibility of treating mental illness through a therapeutic "talking" method gave birth to the field of psychoanalysis.<sup>14</sup>

Melanie Klein encountered psychoanalysis through reading Freud's book *On Dreams* and instantly sought to explore it further. No formal training in psychoanalysis was available at this time, so ideas within the field tended to develop individually. The intellectual origins of *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* can be traced back to the earlier work of, amongst others, Hermine Hug-Hellmuth,<sup>15</sup> who produced a series of papers between 1914 and 1921 describing what is now regarded as psychoanalytically informed educational work with children. In her unpublished autobiography, Klein says that: "Dr Hellmuth was doing child analysis at this time [the beginning of the 1920s] in Vienna, but in a very restricted way. She completely avoided interpretations, though she used some play materials and drawings, and I could never get an impression of what she was actually doing, nor was she analysing children under six or seven years. I do not think it too conceited to say that I introduced in Berlin the beginnings of child analysis."<sup>16</sup>

Klein interpreted children's behaviour in line with the dominant and established intellectual movement of the time, as expressed by Sigmund

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<sup>13</sup> David Smith, *Approaching Psychoanalysis: An Introductory Course* (London: Karnac, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> Psychoanalysis: Psychoanalysis is a therapeutic method, originated by Sigmund Freud, for treating mental disorders by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the patient's mind and bringing repressed fears and conflicts into the conscious mind, using techniques such as dream interpretation and free association. (*OED*)

<sup>15</sup> Hermine Hug-Hellmuth (1871–1924) was an Austrian psychoanalyst. She is regarded as the first psychoanalyst to practise with children.

<sup>16</sup> Phyllis Grosskurth, *Melanie Klein: Her World and Her Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 93.

Freud<sup>17</sup> and her own mentors, Karl Abraham<sup>18</sup> and Sandor Ferenczi,<sup>19</sup> such as the existence of fundamental drives within the unconscious mind. However, early childhood experience and children's relationships with their caregivers were less well understood. In 1931 Freud admitted that for him, "Everything connected with this first mother-attachment has in analysis seemed to me so elusive, lost in a past so dim and shadowy, so hard to resuscitate, that it seemed as if it had undergone some specially inexorable repression."<sup>20</sup>

Klein took the opportunity to introduce original ideas – primarily her technique of child analysis and a different way of thinking about the inner psychic world of the child. In the book *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, Klein sets out a line of thought which is distinguishable from Sigmund Freud and both Hug-Hellmuth's and Freud's daughter Anna's<sup>21</sup> emphasis on the educational aspects of work with children.<sup>22</sup> In 1927 Anna Freud addressed the Berlin Psychoanalytical Society on the subject of child analytic technique. Her presentation was a barely disguised attack on Melanie Klein's approach to psychoanalysis. In response, Ernest Jones organised a symposium for the British Society on the same subject. By 1932, when the book was published, the debate between Anna Freud and Klein had become increasingly bitter. Klein herself acknowledges the differences between her and Anna Freud in the introduction to the book, writing: "It is only within the last ten years or so that more work has been done in the field of child analysis. In the main, two methods have emerged – one represented by Anna Freud and the other by myself ... Her theoretical conclusions are in certain respects different from mine."<sup>23</sup>

In the *Psycho-Analysis of Children*, Klein advocates a method that avoids the educational measures advocated by Anna Freud and begins to build her own original theory, calling for the early interpretation of children's sexual and

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<sup>17</sup> Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was an Austrian neurologist who is known as the father of psychoanalysis. His theories on child sexuality, libido and the ego, among other topics, were some of the most influential academic concepts of the 20th century.

<sup>18</sup> Karl Abraham (1877–1925) was an early and important German psychoanalyst and a collaborator of Sigmund Freud. He founded the Berlin Society of Psychoanalysis in 1910 and was Melanie Klein's analyst from 1924 to 1925.

<sup>19</sup> Sandor Ferenczi (1873–1933) was a Hungarian psychoanalyst and close associate of Sigmund Freud. He collaborated with Otto Rank to create a more empathic "here and now" form of psychotherapy, seen as a precursor to person-centred therapy.

<sup>20</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Female Sexuality," in *The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents, and Other Works*, vol. XXI of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (1927–1931)*, 253–54.

<sup>21</sup> Anna Freud (1895–1982) was Sigmund Freud's daughter and is considered alongside Melanie Klein to be the founder of child psychology.

<sup>22</sup> Melanie Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* (London: Vintage, 1997).

<sup>23</sup> Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, xvi.



primitive destructive wishes.

METADATA: Karl Abraham; Sandor Ferenczi; Anna Freud; Hermine Hug-Hellmuth; Melanie Klein; psychology

In *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, Melanie Klein was seeking to engage primarily with a contemporary audience of scholars and clinicians in the psychoanalytic community in Germany, Austria and the UK, and arguing for the extension of psychoanalytical help to young children.<sup>24</sup> The core ideas in the book are closely related to the preoccupations of psychoanalytical thinking in the 1930s, heavily influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud,<sup>25</sup> Karl Abraham<sup>26</sup> and Sandor Ferenczi,<sup>27</sup> which focused on instinctual “drives” in the human psyche.

Klein was at pains to acknowledge where her ideas chimed with these key figures but also where she differed, such as in her conceptualisation of the role of internalised objects<sup>28</sup> and in her technique of child analysis.<sup>29</sup> The psychoanalytic community would have expected her to back up her arguments through the use of clinical evidence, and this is what she sought to do in the book. She stressed the debt she owed to Freud, and his notions of psychosexual development,<sup>30</sup> penis envy,<sup>31</sup> neurosis<sup>32</sup> and the Oedipus

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<sup>24</sup> Catalina Bronstein, *Kleinian Theory: A Contemporary Perspective* (London: Whurr, 2001), xvi.

<sup>25</sup> Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was an Austrian neurologist who is known as the father of psychoanalysis. His theories on child sexuality, libido and the ego, among other topics, were some of the most influential academic concepts of the 20th century.

<sup>26</sup> Karl Abraham (1877–1925) was an early and important German psychoanalyst and a collaborator of Sigmund Freud. He founded the Berlin Society of Psychoanalysis in 1910 and was Melanie Klein’s analyst from 1924 to 1925.

<sup>27</sup> Sandor Ferenczi (1873–1933) was a Hungarian psychoanalyst and close associate of Sigmund Freud. He collaborated with Otto Rank to create a more empathic “here and now” form of psychotherapy, seen as a precursor to person-centred therapy.

<sup>28</sup> Internalised object: In Kleinian theory, this term denotes an unconscious experience of an object within the self that has motivations and intentions towards the self and is formed through experience of someone or something in the external environment (for example, a parent or the breast).

<sup>29</sup> Child analysis: Child analysis refers to the application of psychoanalytic treatment and concepts to a child with a view to understanding the psychic life and mental development of children.

<sup>30</sup> Psychosexual development: Freud believed that human beings possess from birth an instinctual energy (libido) that develops through stages, characterised by areas of the body (the oral, anal, phallic, latent and genital).

<sup>31</sup> Penis envy: In Freudian psychoanalysis, “penis envy” refers to the theorised reaction of a girl during her psychosexual development to the realisation that she does not have a penis. Freud considered this a defining moment in the development of gender and sexual identity for women.

<sup>32</sup> Neurosis: Neurosis is a class of mental disorders involving distress but not delusions or hallucinations. Such behaviours would now be classed as anxiety disorders and might include obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety attacks, depression, low sense of self-worth and obsessive thoughts. In children, they might include eating disorders, night terrors and phobias.

complex<sup>33</sup> shape the core concepts she introduced in the book. Nevertheless, at the time Klein was working on the academic papers that were later to make up the book, Freud's daughter Anna,<sup>34</sup> who had also begun analysing children, criticised Klein's work heavily, fearing the consequences of probing too much into the unconscious mind of a child.

*The Psycho-Analysis of Children* was timely in that it dealt directly with a contested area within the professional field: that of whether and how children suffering from disturbances in their mental health could be helped by psychoanalysis. In wider society, the book was in many ways ahead of its time by approaching the nature of psychosexual matters in infants and young children. In the early 20th century, and despite Freud's revolutionising of psychology, which had severed psychiatry from neurology, the understanding of child and adolescent mental illness was limited and psychosexual matters (especially with regard to children) were still viewed as taboo in mainstream society. The availability of psychoanalytic treatment was restricted to adults who could afford to pay the considerable fees involved. Klein's detailed description of her clinical approach, including innovations in the technique of child analysis to include early psychoanalytic interpretation<sup>35</sup> of children's play, triggered both support and opposition within her target audience. However, through her extensive cataloguing of clinical evidence for that technique, the book contributed in part to the establishment of child psychoanalysis as a legitimate activity.

The years between 1926, when Klein arrived in London, and the start of the Second World War in 1939 were a period of both great hardship and social change due to the worldwide economic depression and high rates of unemployment that followed the Wall Street Crash. The year 1929 had seen the first socialist Labour government elected in a socially and politically divided UK, and a rise in the number of Jewish immigrants arriving from Germany in the shadow of fascism. The progress of the women's movement had led to women being given the right to vote in 1928, but they were still in many ways treated as second-class citizens in the workplace and were expected to conform to traditional gender roles.

METADATA: Karl Abraham; Sandor Ferenczi; Anna Freud; Sigmund Freud;

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<sup>33</sup> Oedipus complex: In psychoanalytic theory, the term "Oedipus complex" denotes the emotions and ideas that the mind keeps in the unconscious, via dynamic repression, which concentrate upon a child's desire to sexually possess the parent of the opposite sex (that is, males are attracted to their mothers while females are attracted to their fathers).

<sup>34</sup> Anna Freud (1895–1982) was Sigmund Freud's daughter and is considered alongside Melanie Klein to be the founder of child psychology.

<sup>35</sup> Interpretation: Interpretation is the process of verbal intervention whereby previously unconscious aspects of a person's psychological functioning are uncovered.

Melanie Klein; penis envy; psychology; psychosexual development

Melanie Klein was a Jewish, middle-class woman who lived first in Budapest, then in Berlin and finally in London. She received no formal university education and the bulk of her ideas were built up through clinical observation, initially of her colleagues' children and, some authors strongly believe, of her own children too.<sup>36</sup> Her own independent study and subsequent production and presentation of papers led to her acceptance as a member of psychoanalytic societies in Budapest, Berlin and finally Britain. In 1914, she read *The Interpretation of Dreams*<sup>37</sup> by Sigmund Freud;<sup>38</sup> this led her to dedicate herself wholly to psychoanalysis.<sup>39</sup> She had already begun working with children by 1918 and became a member of the Hungarian Psychoanalytic Society in 1919. Around this time she entered into analysis with Sandor Ferenczi<sup>40</sup> in Budapest. After she moved to Berlin in 1921, she worked for five years at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Policlinic and went into analysis with Karl Abraham,<sup>41</sup> who suggested that she develop psychoanalytic treatment for children. Ferenczi urged Klein to analyse her own children, and in a study clearly analogous with Freud's analysis of "Little Hans,"<sup>42</sup> Klein took her own son, Erich, as a subject, so bringing the insights of a mother to psychoanalysis. By the time she was invited by Ernest Jones to give a series of lectures in 1925, she had treated at least 22 children and adolescents.<sup>43</sup>

The years running up to the publication of *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* saw an increasingly bitter debate develop between Klein and Anna Freud.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Julia Segal, *Melanie Klein* (London: Sage, 1992), 11.

<sup>37</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (New York: Macmillan, 1913).

<sup>38</sup> Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was an Austrian neurologist who is known as the father of psychoanalysis. His theories on child sexuality, libido and the ego, among other topics, were some of the most influential academic concepts of the 20th century.

<sup>39</sup> Psychoanalysis: Psychoanalysis is a therapeutic method, originated by Sigmund Freud, for treating mental disorders by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the patient's mind and bringing repressed fears and conflicts into the conscious mind, using techniques such as dream interpretation and free association. (*OED*)

<sup>40</sup> Sandor Ferenczi (1873–1933) was a Hungarian psychoanalyst and close associate of Sigmund Freud. He collaborated with Otto Rank to create a more empathic "here and now" form of psychotherapy, seen as a precursor to person-centred therapy.

<sup>41</sup> Karl Abraham (1877–1925) was an early and important German psychoanalyst and a collaborator of Sigmund Freud. He founded the Berlin Society of Psychoanalysis in 1910 and was Melanie Klein's analyst from 1924 to 1925.

<sup>42</sup> "Little Hans": The "Little Hans" study is an in-depth study of a five-year-old boy who was suffering from a phobia of horses. The study was conducted by Freud through letters sent to him by the boy's father.

<sup>43</sup> Alfred Ernest Jones (1879–1958) was a British psychoanalyst and Sigmund Freud's official biographer. He was the first English-speaking psychoanalyst, founded the British Psychoanalytical Society in 1919 and was its president in the 1920s and 1930s.

<sup>44</sup> Anna Freud (1895–1982) was Sigmund Freud's daughter and is considered alongside Melanie Klein to be the founder of child psychology.

Anna Freud's training as a teacher led her towards a more educationally based form of child analysis, whereas Klein felt it was important to allow the child, free from adult authority, to play freely. On March 19th 1927, Anna Freud addressed the Berlin Society on the subject of child analytic technique. Her presentation was a barely disguised attack on Melanie Klein's approach to psychoanalysis.<sup>45</sup> In response, Ernest Jones organised a symposium for the British Society on the same subject. Klein gave a series of lectures describing her analytical work with children and her own original ideas on the interplay between guilt and anxiety, and love and hatred, and calling for the early interpretation of sexual and primitive destructive wishes. The process of rebutting Anna Freud's criticisms forced Klein to bolster the evidence for her theories through description of clinical observations. These form the basis for the book and ultimately the creation of two different branches of psychoanalysis in the British Psychoanalytic Society.<sup>46</sup>

METADATA: Karl Abraham; Sandor Ferenczi; Anna Freud; Ernest Jones; Melanie Klein; Little Hans; psychology; The Interpretation of Dreams

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<sup>45</sup> Janet Sayers, *Kleinians: Psychoanalysis Inside Out* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 17.

<sup>46</sup> Segal, *Melanie Klein*, 12.

Melanie Klein's influence on the field of psychology has been considerable. Many of the ideas now widely accepted about children – how they experience the world, the importance of carers and other key figures in children's development, that they are more than a bundle of instincts, that they think and feel from birth – have arisen as a result of her substantial body of work and its influence on others who followed her thinking. According to Julia Segal,<sup>47</sup> "Melanie Klein's name has been at the centre of controversies both within the psychoanalytical community and outside of it." Her work challenges the assumptions and beliefs of people who know nothing of psychoanalysis because she insists on opening up to examination areas of human experience which many would prefer to remain taboo and hidden. Those who use her ideas in their work as counsellors, psychotherapists and psychoanalysts are challenged to examine further the relationship between themselves and their clients.<sup>48</sup>

Seen in the context of Klein's influential corpus, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* is the culmination of her early work, written at a moment of transition,<sup>49</sup> which has opened up new ways for counsellors and psychotherapists to approach their work with children and adults who are suffering from varying degrees of mental illness.<sup>50</sup> The book amounts to a distillation of a number of key papers that Klein produced prior to its publication, many of which were a result of her substantial clinical experience in applying psychoanalytic treatment to both young and older children.

Klein modified her theories in later years, but the book remains one of her most important texts, anticipating developments in her work such as those described in her "Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms" of 1946.<sup>51</sup> This later paper – in which she clarified her radical theories of the mental functioning of infants in the first three months and their relationships to their mothers, and included the development of her theories of the paranoid-schizoid<sup>52</sup> and

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<sup>47</sup> Julia Segal, M.A., FBACP, works as a counsellor in London. She is the author of several books and papers on the subject of Melanie Klein and her work.

<sup>48</sup> Julia Segal, *Melanie Klein* (London: Sage, 1992), 1.

<sup>49</sup> Melanie Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, (London: Vintage, 1997), 284.

<sup>50</sup> Catalina Bronstein, *Kleinian Theory: A Contemporary Perspective* (London: Whurr, 2001), xvi.

<sup>51</sup> Melanie Klein. "Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 27 (1946): 99–110.

<sup>52</sup> Paranoid-schizoid position: The paranoid-schizoid position is a state of mind in children, from birth to four or six months of age, characterised by the fear of invasive malevolence and anxiety about imminent annihilation. Klein posits that the infant deals with this anxiety by splitting off bad feelings and projecting them outwards.

depressive “positions”<sup>53</sup> – marked the start of a new era for Klein. In writings such as these, Klein left a legacy to those such as Donald Winnicott and Wilfred Bion who would afterwards continue to build on and reformulate her complex ideas in a changing social context. The practice of intensive analysis with children which Klein describes in the book has waned since the 1950s and 1960s, due in part to the demands (in terms of both time and cost) it placed on the child and family.<sup>54</sup> However, her ideas retain an influence over therapeutic work with adults and children, despite challenges from alternative forms of therapeutic intervention such as cognitive behavioural therapy.

METADATA: Counselling; depressive position; Melanie Klein; “Notes on Schizoid Mechanisms”; paranoid schizoid position; psychology; psychotherapy

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<sup>53</sup> Depressive position: The depressive position is a state of mind where the child ego is able to bring together good and bad feelings towards objects and involves mourning the loss of those that were previously idealised.

<sup>54</sup> Susan Warshaw, “Whatever Happened to Kleinian Child Analysis?” *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 11, no. 3 (1994).



In *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, Melanie Klein was writing partly to strengthen public understanding of Freudian<sup>55</sup> psychoanalysis with children and partly to secure wider acceptance of her own approach to child analysis amongst her contemporaries in the professional psychoanalytic community. In the book she seeks to claim that it is possible to analyse the internal world of younger children more deeply than had been attempted until then. She believed there to be no difference between the principles of psychoanalysing children and adults, but argued that they required different techniques.<sup>56</sup>

Kleinian concepts are notoriously difficult to grasp, as they seem so remote from common sense and experience. Hinshelwood<sup>57</sup> in his *Dictionary of Kleinian Thought* states that “It is impossible in the written word to pass on a sense of understanding,” since “much of the inaccessibility of Kleinian thought comes about not only because it is framed in the patient’s own experiences but because those experiences are so very remote from conscious and verbal thought, and so difficult to communicate in a manner that is verifiable outside the particular analyst–patient relationship.”<sup>58</sup>

Klein herself recognised that her ideas would emerge more clearly through the discussion of practice examples, and this is why she chooses to use such clinical examples in her book. The book is therefore a collection of clinical papers (part 1), originally lectures, and theoretical chapters (part 2) on the implications of her observations for the psychosexual development<sup>59</sup> of boys and girls. If her original plan was to devote the first part to a description of the clinical technique and the second to her theoretical conclusions, the second part seems to have outgrown itself in the course of writing, and widens her theoretical discussion to include the psychoanalysis of adults. This revision, and the fact that Klein seems to be more concerned with developing new insight than with retaining consistency in her ideas, arguably leads to some complexity and incoherence in her thought.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was an Austrian neurologist who is known as the father of psychoanalysis. His theories on child sexuality, libido and the ego, among other topics, were some of the most influential academic concepts of the 20th century.

<sup>56</sup> Melanie Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* (London: Vintage, 1997), xvi.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Hinshelwood is Professor of Psychoanalytic Studies at the University of Essex, UK. He has written numerous books and papers on the subject of psychoanalysis and its history.

<sup>58</sup> Robert Hinshelwood, *A Dictionary of Kleinian Thought* (London: Free Association Books, 1995), 1.

<sup>59</sup> Psychosexual development: Freud believed that human beings possess from birth an instinctual energy (libido) that develops through stages, characterised by areas of the body (the oral, anal, phallic, latent and genital).

<sup>60</sup> Hinshelwood, *A Dictionary of Kleinian Thought*, 103.

Catalina Bronstein acknowledges that “Reading Melanie Klein’s work is not always easy. She often wrote using very concrete language.”<sup>61</sup> As is often the case in the development of ideas over time, the meaning carried by theoretical concepts can change, which can confuse the modern-day reader. The fact that Klein uses clinical material to illustrate her technique adds weight to her ideas and is useful for practitioners who are seeking to develop their own practice (as she intended), but this can present some difficulties for non-clinicians seeking to understand her theoretical ideas in depth.<sup>62</sup>

METADATA: Clinical technique; Robert Hinshelwood; Melanie Klein; part 1; part 2; psychology; theory

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<sup>61</sup> Catalina Bronstein, *Kleinian Theory: A Contemporary Perspective* (London: Whurr, 2001), xv.

<sup>62</sup> Bronstein, *Kleinian Theory*, xv.

By the 1920s, when Melanie Klein began her work, Sigmund Freud<sup>63</sup> and other psychoanalysts such as Karl Abraham<sup>64</sup> and Sandor Ferenczi<sup>65</sup> had developed considerable insight into childhood. Arguably, as a woman and a mother operating within a male-dominated field, Klein was able to bring a distinctive insight to the core question of how children's fantasies, beliefs, feelings and thoughts could be revealed and interpreted in order to improve their mental health.<sup>66</sup> She learnt to psychoanalyse children through applying her reading of Freud's work to the analysis first of her own children and then of a number of children suffering from mental health problems.<sup>67</sup>

Where her work stands out from the mainstream is in her willingness to interpret boldly what could be disturbing and unpalatable material. In *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, Klein sought to clarify the underlying causes of childhood neurosis<sup>68</sup> and psychosis.<sup>69</sup> She addressed two core questions that had arisen naturally as a result of earlier enquiry in the field of psychoanalysis: how could psychoanalytical techniques be applied to children and how do children form their sense of self? The first question is important because until this point many of Klein's contemporaries in the psychoanalytic community believed that children lacked the ability to verbalise their thoughts and would therefore be unresponsive to psychoanalysis. The second question is important because it involves asking whether the child's sense of self is formed through their relationship with objects in their environment, or as a result of innate drives within the ego,<sup>70</sup> as Freud had suggested.

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<sup>63</sup> Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was an Austrian neurologist who is known as the father of psychoanalysis. His theories on child sexuality, libido and the ego, among other topics, were some of the most influential academic concepts of the 20th century.

<sup>64</sup> Karl Abraham (1877–1925) was an early and important German psychoanalyst and a collaborator of Sigmund Freud. He founded the Berlin Society of Psychoanalysis in 1910 and was Melanie Klein's analyst from 1924 to 1925.

<sup>65</sup> Sandor Ferenczi (1873–1933) was a Hungarian psychoanalyst and close associate of Sigmund Freud. He collaborated with Otto Rank to create a more empathic "here and now" form of psychotherapy, seen as a precursor to person-centred therapy.

<sup>66</sup> Julia Segal, *Melanie Klein* (London: Sage, 1992), 134.

<sup>67</sup> Segal, *Melanie Klein*, 7.

<sup>68</sup> Neurosis: Neurosis is a class of mental disorders involving distress but not delusions or hallucinations. Such behaviours would now be classed as anxiety disorders and might include obsessive–compulsive disorder, anxiety attacks, depression, low sense of self-worth and obsessive thoughts. In children, they might include eating disorders, night terrors and phobias.

<sup>69</sup> Psychosis: Psychosis is a term given to more severe forms of psychiatric disorder involving a loss of contact with reality, during which hallucinations and/or delusions, violence and impaired insight may occur.

<sup>70</sup> Ego: Ego refers to that part of the mind most conscious of self and which, acted upon by both the id and the super-ego, mediates with the environment. (*OED*)

Although Klein was firmly embedded in Freudian psychoanalysis, she was especially interested in his stages of psychosexual development (oral, anal, phallic, latent and genital)<sup>71</sup> and the questions of when the “superego”<sup>72</sup> and Oedipus complex<sup>73</sup> develop (phenomena that until then had been thought to occur later in a child’s development). Klein set out to answer these questions by looking at a series of clinical practice examples of young children before moving into a broader discussion of children’s experience of what she called “early anxiety situations.”<sup>74</sup> She believed firmly that in child analysis children would transfer (on to the analyst and the toys in their play) repressed anxieties, which she saw as rooted in children’s relationships with, and experiences of, objects in their external world. These could be then interpreted and resolved through her play technique.

METADATA: Early anxiety situations; Melanie Klein; neurosis; psychology; psychosexual development; psychosis

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<sup>71</sup> Psychosexual development: Freud believed that human beings possess from birth an instinctual energy (libido) that develops through stages, characterised by areas of the body (the oral, anal, phallic, latent and genital).

<sup>72</sup> Superego: In Freudian theory the superego is that part of a person’s mind that acts as a self-critical conscience or censor, reflecting standards and behaviour learned from parents and society; the agent of self-criticism or self-observation that acts as a check on the id and the ego. (*OED*)

<sup>73</sup> Oedipus complex: In psychoanalytic theory, the term “Oedipus complex” denotes the emotions and ideas that the mind keeps in the unconscious, via dynamic repression, which concentrate upon a child’s desire to sexually possess the parent of the opposite sex (that is, males are attracted to their mothers whereas females are attracted to their fathers).

<sup>74</sup> Melanie Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* (London: Vintage 1997), 121.

The original ideas contained in *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* can be traced back to the work of others in the psychoanalytic school such as Sigmund<sup>75</sup> and Anna Freud,<sup>76</sup> Hermine Hug-Hellmuth,<sup>77</sup> Sandor Ferenczi<sup>78</sup> and Karl Abraham.<sup>79</sup> Sigmund Freud believed he had discovered the phases of psychosexual development<sup>80</sup> from the psychoanalysis of adults, but when he wanted to apply these theories with children, such as in his study of “Little Hans” (1909), he asked others to collect observations on their children.<sup>81</sup> He remained pessimistic about working with children, and this seemed to deter others from trying. Notwithstanding this, interest grew in the therapeutic treatment of disturbed children, often in connection with their difficulties in education. The approach of his daughter, Anna Freud, was characterised by a mixture of psychoanalytic and educational aims. She worked initially as a primary school teacher and was concerned (like Hug-Hellmuth before her) about the dangers of opening up repressed feelings during child analysis, some of which might have been caused by the parents.

Klein preferred direct, open exploration of taboo psychosexual notions. She disagreed with Hug-Hellmuth’s view that analysis should include furnishing the child with moral and aesthetic values, and with Anna Freud, who felt children could not withstand the unearthing of unconscious thoughts. Klein felt deep analysis with children could alleviate anxiety, not create it, and that educational aims were incompatible with therapeutic aims, which required pure interpretation on the part of the analyst.<sup>82</sup>

As early as 1918, Klein was working directly with children and by 1919 she

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<sup>75</sup> Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was an Austrian neurologist who is known as the father of psychoanalysis. His theories on child sexuality, libido and the ego, among other topics, were some of the most influential academic concepts of the 20th century.

<sup>76</sup> Anna Freud (1895–1982) was Sigmund Freud’s daughter and is considered alongside Melanie Klein to be the founder of child psychology.

<sup>77</sup> Hermine Hug-Hellmuth (1871–1924) was an Austrian psychoanalyst. She is regarded as the first psychoanalyst to practise with children.

<sup>78</sup> Sandor Ferenczi (1873–1933) was a Hungarian psychoanalyst and close associate of Sigmund Freud. He collaborated with Otto Rank to create a more empathic “here and now” form of psychotherapy, seen as a precursor to person-centred therapy.

<sup>79</sup> Karl Abraham (1877–1925) was an early and important German psychoanalyst and a collaborator of Sigmund Freud. He founded the Berlin Society of Psychoanalysis in 1910 and was Melanie Klein’s analyst from 1924 to 1925.

<sup>80</sup> Psychosexual development: Freud believed that human beings possess from birth an instinctual energy (libido) that develops through stages, characterised by areas of the body (the oral, anal, phallic, latent and genital).

<sup>81</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Analysis of a Phobia of a Five Year Old Boy,” *Pelican Freud Library, Case Histories 1* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1977).

<sup>82</sup> Melanie Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* (London: Vintage, 1997), xvi.

was beginning to interpret their play. She took forward and then modified Freud and Ferenczi's work on the characteristics of infantile omnipotence,<sup>83</sup> introjection<sup>84</sup> and projection.<sup>85</sup> By the time Klein came to write *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* in 1932, she had already generated her own distinctive concept of mental functioning, which included recognition of early aggressive impulses such as oral sadism and the early repression of the Oedipus complex<sup>86</sup> in infants. In the book she presents her ideas of speech, play, actions and dreams as expressive of the child's unconscious mind, along with what she saw as the inhibitory effects of aggression. The publication of the book established Klein's distinctive position as the founder of a new sub-discipline within the field of psychoanalysis – that of the object relations school.<sup>87</sup>

METADATA: Aggressive phantasies; Anna Freud; Sigmund Freud; Hermine Hug-Hellmuth; Melanie Klein; object relations; psychology; unconscious mind

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<sup>83</sup> Infantile omnipotence: Infantile omnipotence refers to the misapprehension of reality in infants, whereby they overestimate the power of their thoughts over external reality.

<sup>84</sup> Introjection: Introjection denotes the taking into oneself of behaviours, attributes of others or aspects of the external world.

<sup>85</sup> Projection: Projection denotes the attribution of part of the self to an external object or person.

<sup>86</sup> Oedipus complex: In psychoanalytic theory, the term "Oedipus complex" denotes the emotions and ideas that the mind keeps in the unconscious, via dynamic repression, which concentrate upon a child's desire to sexually possess the parent of the opposite sex (that is, males are attracted to their mothers whereas females are attracted to their fathers).

<sup>87</sup> Object relations theory: Object relations theory is a strand of psychoanalytic theory. It can be contrasted with the classical or ego-psychology school, which focuses on the role of instinctual drives in human development. It focuses more on the relationships between the developing self and internal and external objects.

In *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, Melanie Klein presents her pioneering ideas of how psychoanalysis can be applied to the minds of small children by employing a new technique of psychoanalysis<sup>88</sup> that involves interpreting their play as a window on their unconscious minds. Her theoretical analysis is rooted in, but then seeks to challenge, Sigmund Freud's<sup>89</sup> ideas on children's psychosexual development<sup>90</sup> by arguing that it does not proceed as sequentially as Freud had suggested. She addresses the questions of how children form their sense of self and how this is connected with how they relate to the caregivers within their environment. She is especially interested in questions about what causes problems with psychosexual development.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part describes, through a series of case studies, Klein's extensive practical clinical experience with children of differing ages, all of whom, to varying degrees, displayed signs of experiencing mental health problems. For example, she describes the case of Erna – a girl who had witnessed her parents having sex as a young girl. This led to her experiencing intensified feelings of frustration and envy, and brought about obsessive behaviour (masturbation, thumb-sucking, rocking, and so on). Klein describes, in detail, her innovative "play technique," whereby she gave such children a collection of toys and watched them arrange the toys in different relationships to each other. She saw her technique as equivalent to the use of free association<sup>91</sup> in adult psychoanalysis and therefore capable of revealing the child's inner world. Deep psychoanalytic interpretation of children's play could, according to Klein, lead to a reduction in a range of anxiety disorders, including phobias and night terrors. These methodological innovations led to substantial progress in the development of psychoanalytic treatment of children with mental illness.

The second part of the book is more theoretical and discusses how feelings of

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<sup>88</sup> Psychoanalysis: Psychoanalysis is a therapeutic method, originated by Sigmund Freud, for treating mental disorders by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the patient's mind and bringing repressed fears and conflicts into the conscious mind, using techniques such as dream interpretation and free association. (*OED*)

<sup>89</sup> Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was an Austrian neurologist who is known as the father of psychoanalysis. His theories on child sexuality, libido and the ego, among other topics, were some of the most influential academic concepts of the 20th century.

<sup>90</sup> Psychosexual development: Freud believed that human beings possess from birth an instinctual energy (libido) that develops through stages, characterised by areas of the body (the oral, anal, phallic, latent and genital).

<sup>91</sup> Free association: Free association is a technique developed by Freud to analyse mental processes in order to gain insight into subconscious processes. Patients are invited to relate whatever comes into their minds during the analytic session, and not to censor their thoughts.

anxiety, aggression and jealousy in infancy affect the psychosexual development of children. Her overarching argument is that a certain degree of anxiety spurs on development, but if this anxiety is not dealt with, it can lead to mental illness in later life. According to Klein, children feel aggression towards their caregivers, but this is matched with drives to love and repair the damage done by this aggression; and to help ease the anxiety caused by these conflicting desires, some acknowledgement of that aggression is essential. For Klein, the satisfactory regulation of anxieties in infancy determines the whole nature of our experiences as adults.<sup>92</sup>

METADATA: Anxiety; children; free association; Sigmund Freud; Melanie Klein; play technique; phobias; psychology; psychosexual development

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<sup>92</sup> Melanie Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* (London: Vintage, 1997), 279.



Melanie Klein organises *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* in two broad parts: the first part catalogues a series of clinical examples to illustrate her technique and the second develops her conceptual understanding of child and adolescent development. There is also a final appendix (“The Scope and Limits of Child Analysis”).

Part I contains arguably the most significant theme of *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*: a description of the tool from which all of her discoveries came – her play technique. She begins with descriptions of the technique applied to small and then older children, illustrated through the use of case studies. In a series of chapters, Klein moves through description of her clinical experiences with children of advancing age, including her interpretation of neurotic<sup>93</sup> behaviour and childhood illnesses, and a discussion of the sexual activities of children.

In Part II, Klein sets out her theoretical analysis, both rooted in, and a challenge to, contemporary psychoanalytic thought. In contrast to previous psychoanalytic approaches, Klein stresses the affective (or emotional) aspects of children’s lives.<sup>94</sup> She seeks to explain this in a series of equally significant, but arguably less cohesive, chapters that describe the developmental processes of early and later childhood. She discusses the significance of “early anxiety situations” in the development of the ego and the sexual development of girls and boys. The book ends with the analysis of “Mr. B” (a gay man) and an appendix, “The Scope and Limits of Child Analysis,” which contains a clear expression of her views on the value of psychoanalytic treatment of children.

*The Psycho-Analysis of Children* needs to be approached with a clear understanding of the historical and social context in which it was written and the key thinkers by whom Klein was influenced, such as Sigmund Freud,<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Neurosis: Neurosis is a class of mental disorders involving distress but not delusions or hallucinations. Such behaviours would now be classed as anxiety disorders and might include obsessive–compulsive disorder, anxiety attacks, depression, low sense of self-worth and obsessive thoughts. In children, they might include eating disorders, night terrors and phobias.

<sup>94</sup> Stephen Frosh, *A Brief introduction to Psychoanalytic Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 108.

<sup>95</sup> Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was an Austrian neurologist who is known as the father of psychoanalysis. His theories on child sexuality, libido and the ego, among other topics, were some of the most influential academic concepts of the 20th century.

Karl Abraham<sup>96</sup> and Sandor Ferenczi.<sup>97</sup> The book can be criticised for its ethnocentric,<sup>98</sup> androcentric<sup>99</sup> and heterocentric<sup>100</sup> bias, and critical apparatus from other theoretical models of the human mind can be brought to bear on its core ideas. A nuanced and critical understanding of the text demands some awareness of these alternative schools of thought within psychology (such as the behavioural),<sup>101</sup> which in different ways question both the evidential basis and the underlying view of the human mind presented by Klein. In particular, behaviourists question the inability of psychoanalytical thinkers such as Klein to test their theories rigorously through observable experimentation. Despite these valid criticisms, the ideas in the book continue to have relevance today to psychoanalytic work with children who are suffering from the effects of trauma or abuse.

METADATA: Androcentrism; early anxiety; ethnocentrism; heterocentrism; Melanie Klein; play technique; psychology

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<sup>96</sup> Karl Abraham (1877–1925) was an early and important German psychoanalyst and a collaborator of Sigmund Freud. He founded the Berlin Society of Psychoanalysis in 1910 and was Melanie Klein's analyst from 1924 to 1925.

<sup>97</sup> Sandor Ferenczi (1873–1933) was a Hungarian psychoanalyst and close associate of Sigmund Freud. He collaborated with Otto Rank to create a more empathic “here and now” form of psychotherapy, seen as a precursor to person-centred therapy.

<sup>98</sup> Ethnocentrism: Ethnocentrism refers to regarding one's own race or ethnic group as of the greater importance.

<sup>99</sup> Androcentrism: Androcentrism is the practice of placing the masculine point of view at the centre of one's view of the world, culture and history.

<sup>100</sup> Heterocentrism: Heterocentrism is the belief that heterosexual activities and institutions are better than those with a genderless or homosexual orientation.

<sup>101</sup> Behaviourist psychology: Behaviourist psychology is an approach to psychology that emphasises observable and testable phenomena rather than internal mental processes.

In *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, Melanie Klein presents a number of key ideas: her play technique; her theory of object relations and unconscious phantasy; her revision of the superego<sup>102</sup> and Oedipus complex<sup>103</sup> and their role in the creation of early anxiety in children; her analysis of the sexual activities of children; and what she sees as the scope and limits of child analysis.

Klein sets out how she adapted the setting and technique of psychoanalysis so that it became more suitable for children. Whereas adults would “free associate,”<sup>104</sup> she recognises children’s natural urge for activity, that their form of expression is play and that the type, intensity or compulsive nature of that play, how they characterised or damaged toys and other objects, could indicate underlying anxiety. She theorises that processes of splitting<sup>105</sup> and projection<sup>106</sup> illustrated during play served as defence mechanisms,<sup>107</sup> which involved the transference<sup>108</sup> of inner images of key figures (or “imagos”) <sup>109</sup> on to both the toys played with and the analyst.

She outlines how, from birth, the infant struggles to relate to objects like the mother’s breast. Due to his or her limited capacity to recognise what is the intention of the object, and whether the situation will change over time, the object is experienced as either totally bad, or totally good. Eventually and painfully, the infant comes to realise that something of the bad and good exists in all objects, and comes to see them as whole objects, which contain a

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<sup>102</sup> Superego: In Freudian theory the superego is that part of a person’s mind that acts as a self-critical conscience or censor, reflecting standards and behaviour learned from parents and society; the agent of self-criticism or self-observation that acts as a check on the id and the ego. (*OED*)

<sup>103</sup> Oedipus complex: In psychoanalytic theory, the term “Oedipus complex” denotes the emotions and ideas that the mind keeps in the unconscious, via dynamic repression, which concentrate upon a child’s desire to sexually possess the parent of the opposite sex (i.e. males are attracted to their mothers, whereas females are attracted to their fathers).

<sup>104</sup> Free association: Free association is a technique developed by Freud to analyse mental processes in order to gain insight into subconscious processes. Patients are invited to relate whatever comes into their minds during the analytic session, and not to censor their thoughts.

<sup>105</sup> Splitting: Splitting is the failure in a person’s thinking to bring together both positive and negative qualities of the self and others into a cohesive, realistic whole.

<sup>106</sup> Projection: Projection denotes the attribution of part of the self to an external object or person.

<sup>107</sup> Defence mechanisms: Defence mechanisms are psychological strategies brought into play by the unconscious mind to deny or distort reality and defend against feelings of anxiety.

<sup>108</sup> Transference: Transference is the redirection of feelings and desires (related to repressed earlier experiences and relationships) to current persons or objects.

<sup>109</sup> Imago: “Imago” refers to a subjective image of someone (especially a parent) that a person has subconsciously formed and which continues to influence his or her attitudes and behaviour. (*OED*)

range of motives. Children's personality development and sense of self is affected if they fail to move into a more realistic understanding of the objects with which they are in relation. Klein believed that this can continue into adult life. It is this notion of a psychological "position" that can be returned to, as opposed to developmentally sequential stages, that marks out Klein's theoretical analysis from that based on inner drives, and which forms the basis of her later work.

Klein calls the kind of primitive thinking that colours the child's perception of the external world "phantasy," a concept that is particular to Kleinian theory. The "ph" spelling distinguishes this form of unconscious thought from the fantasies that children and adults construct in their conscious mind. Here she distinctively adapts Freud's theory of the death drive or instinct.<sup>110</sup> In a departure from psychoanalytic thought which still retains currency in modern Kleinian theory, she postulates that young children's phantasies include intense feelings of fear, anger and aggressiveness towards their carers, and that this could lead them to physically attack (for example, to bite) objects (the breast, for example). This malevolence was matched with their drives to love and repair damage done to people or objects. To help ease the anxiety caused by these conflicting desires, Klein was certain that they should be brought to the surface as opposed to being left buried in the unconscious.

Klein also innovatively revises the concept of the Oedipus complex<sup>111</sup> and claims that it comes into existence earlier. She felt she had clear evidence of feelings of envy and guilt in children as young as two years old, as displayed in symptoms such as night terrors.<sup>112</sup> She claims that the superego<sup>113</sup> of small children is present from birth, that it is experienced as highly persecutory and that it gradually comes together at the age four to five. She claims that the infant world is conflict-ridden. From birth the baby has two choices: either find a way to satisfy his or her needs, or to annihilate that need by annihilating itself. Children's emotions include jealousy, anxiety and pain triggered by weaning, when oral and anal impulses predominate and lead to sadistic

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<sup>110</sup> Death instinct: The death instinct is what Freud proposed as the unconscious desire to die or self-destruct and return to the inorganic, which is present in the mental life of all human beings.

<sup>111</sup> Oedipus complex: In psychoanalytic theory, the term "Oedipus complex" denotes the emotions and ideas that the mind keeps in the unconscious, via dynamic repression, which concentrate upon a child's desire to sexually possess the parent of the opposite sex (i.e. males are attracted to their mothers, whereas females are attracted to their fathers).

<sup>112</sup> Melanie Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* (London: Vintage, 1997), 4.

<sup>113</sup> Superego: In Freudian theory the superego is that part of a person's mind that acts as a self-critical conscience or censor, reflecting standards and behaviour learned from parents and society; the agent of self-criticism or self-observation that acts as a check on the id and the ego. (*OED*)

phantasies of attacking the mother's body,<sup>114</sup> followed by a fear of retaliation.<sup>115</sup>

This leads to an obsessive compulsive behaviour, such as the observance of certain rules and rituals (cleaning, accumulating, complicated bed ceremonials and physical symptoms such as constipation, and so on), all of which are designed to turn the child's internal fears of being destroyed or attacked on to external objects. Mastering this anxiety (and transforming it into pleasure) is seen as one of the main functions of play. For example, Klein interprets girls playing and identifying with dolls as a way in which they can gain comfort from such anxiety and lessen their fear of abandonment.

Klein feels that anxiety could also lead the infant to regress to earlier stages in their psychosexual development and equate their evolving superego with external objects, and their id<sup>116</sup> with wild and dangerous animals. Thus, a child's belief in imaginary, helpful figures, such as fairies or Father Christmas, helps it to conceal and overcome its fear of bad "imagos."<sup>117</sup> Klein observes that when they were alone, especially at night, small children had the feeling of being surrounded by all sorts of persecutors, such as sorcerers, witches, devils and animals. According to Klein, a child who is frightened of being alone in the dark, or needs to have an object at all times, is displaying behaviour rooted in their early anxiety situations, when the child did not understand that the mother or caregiver would return, and hence experienced temporary absence as permanent.

Klein analyses the sexual activities of children, such as masturbation and sexual activities between siblings, claiming that these trigger guilt and can lead to psychological disturbance and compulsive sexual behaviour in later life, especially where acts of coercion on one side dominate.

In a short summary, Klein makes a number of claims for psychoanalysis with children: namely, that it "lays the foundations for the unimpeded development of the child's future sexual life and personality,"<sup>118</sup> and that "it would be the means not only of helping the individual but of doing incalculable service to

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<sup>114</sup> Sadism: The term "sadism" suggests a pathological extreme of aggression, especially sexually linked, but in psychoanalytic thought it is understood in a less pathological sense and denotes the basic instinctual aggressive feelings within human nature.

<sup>115</sup> Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, 31.

<sup>116</sup> Id: The id in Freudian theory represents the inherited instinctive impulses of the individual, forming part of the unconscious and interacting in the psyche with the ego and the superego.

<sup>117</sup> Imago: "Imago" refers to a subjective image of someone (especially a parent) that a person has subconsciously formed and which continues to influence his or her attitudes and behaviour. (*OED*)

<sup>118</sup> Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, 279.

society as a whole.”<sup>119</sup>

Although this claim for the positive potential of psychoanalysis with all children and society could be characterised as overstated, it is widely accepted that a number of ideas articulated in the book – her incorporation of Freud’s concept of the death instinct and emphasis on various forms of destructive drives towards objects – have led to greater understanding of psychological disturbance in children and adults, and have given rise to important analyses of social issues such as interpersonal violence.<sup>120</sup>

METADATA: Anxiety; compulsive behaviour; Melanie Klein; objects; phantasy; play inhibition; play thought; projection; psychology; splitting

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<sup>119</sup> Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, 282.

<sup>120</sup> Stephen Frosh, *A Brief Introduction to Psychoanalytic Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 109.

*The Psycho-Analysis of Children* contains a number of secondary themes that do not form part of Melanie Klein's core intent but still merit attention – among them her views on the relationship between the analyst and the child's parents, psychoanalysis during adolescence, and the development of femininity and homosexuality.

She recognises that it is likely parents will feel responsible for the child's illness and jealous of the analyst's relationship with the child, and that it will be painful for details of their family life to be exposed. In order to secure passive parental involvement in the process, or at least to ensure that parents did not resist or interfere with it, she describes how she would give parents a brief explanation of what the analysis would involve, including any sensitive or difficult aspects, but also make clear that the analysis itself would remain confidential.<sup>121</sup>

She also outlines how she believed analysis in the latency period<sup>122</sup> presented special difficulties due to the repression characteristic of the child's age. She describes how puberty brings the intensification of instinctual impulses and more "acting out" of phantasies<sup>123</sup> through, for example, an adolescent boy's long fantasies about travel, adventures and fighting, or other activities like playing sport. She believed a boy's intense identification with heroes to be rooted in an intense rivalry with his father. Activities like bike riding and anxieties about riding it too fast are interpreted as castration anxiety<sup>124</sup> and guilt around masturbation. A brother's toy being in need of repair is interpreted as guilt about sexual activity between siblings. With regard to pubescent girls, Klein claims that menstruation arouses strong anxiety because it is the outward sign that the interior of the body has been totally destroyed by the jealous, envious mother.<sup>125</sup> She distinguishes between girls who are "active" and have an attitude of rivalry towards the male sex and those girls who are more "inhibited."

Klein claims the adolescent copes with anxieties by assuming the attitude of

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<sup>121</sup> Melanie Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* (London: Vintage, 1997), 76–79

<sup>122</sup> Latency period: The period in a child's psychosexual development (usually aged three to seven years) where, according to Freud, the libido is suppressed or redirected in other areas.

<sup>123</sup> Phantasies: Phantasies are the mental representation of events in the body; physical sensations that are interpreted as relationships with objects that cause those sensations.

<sup>124</sup> Castration anxiety: Castration anxiety is the fear of emasculation in both the literal and metaphorical sense, and can be taken to include a fear of being insignificant or being dominated.

<sup>125</sup> Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, 85.

defiance and rebelliousness characteristic of puberty, and that this creates difficulty with analyses.<sup>126</sup> She details how all young people, even those who are well adjusted, display challenging behaviour as they seek to overcome challenges in their environment and face frustrations of their desires. For Klein there is a point at which this becomes chronic in nature and a sign of a failure to adapt successfully to their environment. She claims that a range of naughty, disobedient behaviour in children, such as fidgetiness, tics, inhibition in play, difficulties in learning and education, and disinterest (or over-interest) in questions around sex, are all a result of repressing phantasies. Even susceptibility to physical illness or accidents may have a psychic root. For instance, Klein attributes a child continually falling down, or hurting themselves, to feelings of guilt or repressed fears. She sees a child's insatiable demands for, or indifference to, presents as incapacity to tolerate frustration. Other compulsive behaviours are attributable to early aggressive impulses and libidinal desires, or to inner conflicts around the birth of siblings.

*The Psycho-Analysis of Children* also includes a discussion of femininity and how this is related to early anxiety. Klein maintains that, as a result of the frustration the girl feels at being removed from the breast that has been nourishing her, she turns away from the mother towards the father. In phantasy she begins to envy the father and becomes very preoccupied with the inside of her mother's body, because she can see that the mother can become pregnant and produce children. This leads to sadistic, rage and hate-filled phantasies of attacking the mother and robbing her of the contents inside her, stealing her ability to create, and to a fear of reprisal from the mother and a need to resolve feelings of hostility towards the union of the parents. This, Klein claims, is at the root of adult women's anxiety over their physical appearance, their concern over the ravages of the ageing process and sexual problems in later life such as frigidity, whereby the girl or woman displaces her anxiety towards the mother on to the penis. Sexual activities such as sado-masochism are linked to early guilt around the sadistic imaginary attacks made on the mother when the baby was deprived of satisfaction. This forms part of an overall analysis of gender differences in how men and women deal with anxiety, and their choice of partners.

The child perceives both mother and father in a combined object – the combined parent figure being a terrifying persecutor in the child's early life. Klein uses an example of a girl, Erna, who had witnessed her parents having sex as a young girl. This had intensified feelings of frustration and envy, and brought about sadistic phantasies and symptoms such as obsessive masturbation, thumb-sucking and rocking. Klein describes how the little girl

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<sup>126</sup> Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, 85.



would say “There’s something about life I don’t like.”<sup>127</sup>

Klein also describes the processes by which she believes a boy “becomes” homosexual, which she believes arises out of anxieties of heterosexual phantasy being displaced on to the penis. She describes in detail her analysis of a gay man, “Mr B” who displays an aversion to women’s bodies. She claims that Mr B, who was bottle-fed, had begun to liken the bottle teat and pacifier to his father’s penis and turned to it as an object of desire. Having no opportunity to play with girls growing up had prevented him from satisfying his curiosity about, and heightened his fear of, female genitalia. This, combined with being forced to engage in fellatio with his older brother, had led him to become fixated on the penis and to idealise the visible “good penis” of his partner.

This insistence on early and bold interpretation of childhood activity and behaviour, with or without parental involvement, and Klein’s views of adolescence, femininity and sexuality, all attracted criticism at the time and remain contested now, partly because of what is seen as the neglect of social environment as an explanatory factor at the expense of an overt focus on the inner world.<sup>128</sup> However, without her determined focus on identifying and interpreting early, primitive and destructive impulses, Klein’s insight into the relational nature of children’s experience and how this is perpetuated into adolescence and adult life for both men and women might have failed to materialise – or at least have been altered.

METADATA: Combined parent figure; femininity; homosexuality; Melanie Klein; parents; psychology

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<sup>127</sup> Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, 35.

<sup>128</sup> Stephen Frosh, *A Brief Introduction to Psychoanalytic Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 109.

Melanie Klein's clinical observations in *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* had far-reaching implications that conflicted with the work of Sigmund Freud<sup>129</sup> – although she felt she was not contradicting Freud's theories but deepening their meaning. Freud had already established that projection allows the subject to replace an internal object with an external perceptual one. This had the advantage that the subject can then protect him or herself against the external danger by fleeing from it and avoiding perception of it, whereas it is useless to flee from dangers that arise from within. Extending this further, Klein focused on the content of those anxieties and saw the unconscious mind as wholly constructed through relationships with internal and external objects.

In line with orthodox psychoanalysis at that time, she assumed the existence of an Oedipus complex<sup>130</sup> and castration anxiety<sup>131</sup> as part of a range of complexes.<sup>132</sup> Like Freud's theory, Klein's is centred on the baby's very early pre-Oedipal relationship with the mother and the emotionally fraught nature of the infant's experiences. However, whereas Freud theorised that the child introjects<sup>133</sup> the father as a superego<sup>134</sup> during the Oedipal crisis, she claims that the superego is formed in the earliest stages of the child's life, prior to the resolution of the Oedipus complex and as part of its phantasies<sup>135</sup> about the mother. Whereas Freud's view of the unconscious was one dominated by desire, Klein postulates an unconscious permeated with anxiety borne out of the helpless state into which babies find themselves thrust. Freud thought that children only experienced guilt once the superego had developed around the

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<sup>129</sup> Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was an Austrian neurologist who is known as the father of psychoanalysis. His theories on child sexuality, libido and the ego, among other topics, were some of the most influential academic concepts of the 20th century.

<sup>130</sup> Oedipus complex: In psychoanalytic theory, the term "Oedipus complex" denotes the emotions and ideas that the mind keeps in the unconscious, via dynamic repression, which concentrate upon a child's desire to sexually possess the parent of the opposite sex (i.e. males are attracted to their mothers, whereas females are attracted to their fathers).

<sup>131</sup> Castration anxiety: Castration anxiety is the fear of emasculation in both the literal and metaphorical sense, and can be taken to include a fear of being insignificant or being dominated.

<sup>132</sup> Complexes: Complexes are a core pattern of emotions, memories, perceptions and wishes in the personal unconscious, organised around a common theme, such as power or status.

<sup>133</sup> Introjection: Introjection denotes the taking into oneself of behaviours, attributes of others or aspects of the external world.

<sup>134</sup> Superego: In Freudian theory the superego is that part of a person's mind that acts as a self-critical conscience or censor, reflecting standards and behaviour learned from parents and society; the agent of self-criticism or self-observation that acts as a check on the id and the ego. (*OED*)

<sup>135</sup> Phantasies: Phantasies are the mental representation of events in the body; physical sensations that are interpreted as relationships with objects that cause those sensations.

age of six, but Klein felt that the breast formed the basis of the superego.<sup>136</sup> She argues that from a very early age the infant perceives people around him or her as having personalities, rather than just being bodies. In a departure from Freud, this causes anxiety and guilt, in part caused by the child's own destructive phantasies directed against external objects from which it anticipates some kind of reprisal.

The originality of Klein's thinking resides mainly in her drawing of equivalence between children's play and free association,<sup>137</sup> and her theory that interpretations of anxiety symbolised in their play could have the effect of easing or modifying their anxiety. Although her theory is developmental in that she describes what happens step by step, she writes about positions rather than phases of development. Her emphasis that both children and adults can move between unconscious structures throughout their life had important implications for both child and adult psychoanalysis. This is because it challenges the view of fragmented, psychotic states of mind as resulting from fixation or failure of development, positing instead an approach which emphasises their pervasive, foundational and functional role in healthy development.

METADATA: Castration anxiety; complexes; guilt; Melanie Klein; Oedipus complex; positions; psychology; superego

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<sup>136</sup> Janet Sayers, *Kleinians: Psychoanalysis Inside Out* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 3.

<sup>137</sup> Free association: Free association is a technique developed by Freud to analyse mental processes in order to gain insight into subconscious processes. Patients are invited to relate whatever comes into their minds during the analytic session, and not to censor their thoughts.

Melanie Klein's ideas had come under attack before the publication of *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*. During the 1920s the first differences between Klein and Anna Freud<sup>138</sup> (representing the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society)<sup>139</sup> arose over the function of education in child psychoanalysis. Anna Freud's approach was characterised by a mixture of psychoanalytic and educational aims. Conversely, Klein thought education should have no place in analysis, preferring pure interpretation.<sup>140</sup>

Anna Freud and her colleagues in the Vienna Society also felt that child analysis was appropriate only when a child developed a neurosis,<sup>141</sup> whereas Klein felt every child could benefit from analysis and that children's anxieties could be analysed from the beginning.<sup>142</sup> Klein was challenged on the issue of the safety of child analysis. Concerns were raised over children's deepest feelings being unearthed and it was argued that the inability of the child to give his or her consent made analysis undesirable, even dangerous. Anna Freud felt that an introductory phase of analysis was necessary to make the child "analysable." During this phase the analyst should make herself interesting to the child and seek to develop an affectionate attachment before treatment could begin. Freud claimed that children under seven could not be helped because they could not cooperate with psychoanalytical technique, and she criticised Klein for engaging in an abuse of her power.

Anna Freud also felt that Klein was wrong to equate children's play with free association and that she over-interpreted children's activity during play (such as the banging together of two trains as symbolising intercourse, or a child emptying a bag as symbolic of a desire to rob the contents of her mother's womb). She felt these actions could have harmless explanations, such as a witnessing of real events in the child's external and changing environment.<sup>143</sup> Klein, on the other hand, sought to stress continually the child's relationship

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<sup>138</sup> Anna Freud (1895–1982) was Sigmund Freud's daughter and is considered alongside Melanie Klein to be the founder of child psychology.

<sup>139</sup> The Vienna Psychoanalytic Society commenced its meetings in Sigmund Freud's apartment in 1902. By 1908 it was the international psychoanalytic authority of the time.

<sup>140</sup> G. Donaldson, "Between Practice and Theory: Melanie Klein, Anna Freud and the Development of Child Analysis," *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences* 32 (1996): 166.

<sup>141</sup> Neurosis: Neurosis is a class of mental disorders involving distress but not delusions or hallucinations. Such behaviours would now be classed as anxiety disorders and might include obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety attacks, depression, low sense of self-worth and obsessive thoughts. In children, they might include eating disorders, night terrors and phobias.

<sup>142</sup> Donaldson, "Between Practice and Theory," 166.

<sup>143</sup> Donaldson, "Between Practice and Theory," 166.

with his or her internal reality<sup>144</sup> and interpreted children's play in these terms, often very early in the analysis.

According to the Freudian view, human instinctual drives had a source and an aim, but no object. The Anna Freud group felt that in the first few months of a baby's life the baby was driven solely to satisfy his or her bodily needs, and that anyone could fulfil this need. In this sense what they saw as driving the baby was simply a form of pleasure-seeking and pain-avoidance. Klein believed that the drive was focused on an object, such as the breast or the mother. There was also a reluctance to accept Klein's conclusions that the Oedipus complex<sup>145</sup> commenced before the genital phase.

From 1943 to 1944, a series of discussions (the "Controversial Discussions") was held (and later published) to examine the differences between the followers of Klein and the followers of Anna Freud.<sup>146</sup> The Kleinians gave a series of four papers on controversial aspects of their theories. There was no resolution of the disagreements with the Viennese School, and each side agreed to develop its own training regimes. In some respects Anna Freud later moved closer to Klein's views and identified several areas where she accepted the premises of Klein's thinking.<sup>147</sup>

METADATA: Education; Anna Freud; Melanie Klein; Klein-Freud controversies; psychology; Viennese School

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<sup>144</sup> Internal reality: Internal reality refers to the memories, ideas and phantasies which the child represents to him or herself.

<sup>145</sup> Oedipus complex: In psychoanalytic theory, the term "Oedipus complex" denotes the emotions and ideas that the mind keeps in the unconscious, via dynamic repression, which concentrate upon a child's desire to sexually possess the parent of the opposite sex (that is, males are attracted to their mothers, whereas females are attracted to their fathers).

<sup>146</sup> Pearl King and Ricardo Steiner, *The Freud-Klein Controversies (1941–45)* (London: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>147</sup> Donaldson, "Between Practice and Theory," 172.

Klein's theoretical ideas developed significantly through her response to the criticism she received from contemporaries such as Anna Freud<sup>148</sup> and the Viennese Psychoanalytic Society, both before and after the publication of *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*. In the book she rebuts the criticism that deep analysis was dangerous to children. She claims that the act of interpreting play early in the analysis quickly reduced the child's anxiety and brought about closeness in the relationship with the analyst, writing: "For instance, when Rita, who was a very ambivalent child, felt a resistance she at once wanted to leave the room, and I had to make an interpretation immediately so as to resolve the resistance. As soon as I had clarified for her the cause of the resistance – always carrying it back to its original object and situation – it was resolved, and she would become friendly and trustful again and continue playing, supplying in its various details a confirmation of the interpretation I had just given."<sup>149</sup>

Klein argued that bringing both the child's hatred and love for his or her parents into conscious awareness enabled a more realistic view to develop and that the hated parts of the self, which the child was projecting<sup>150</sup> on to the parents, could be taken back into the self, to the child's benefit.

Anna Freud stressed how the child's relationships with significant others in his or her life impacted on how they related to the analyst, acknowledging that a child's initial behaviour in analysis may be to do with anxiety around their surroundings and experience in the present situation or moment. For example, she believed that if a child has been starved of affection, he or she might immediately be drawn to someone who shows care towards them, such as the analyst. She felt an introductory phase of analysis was necessary, during which the analyst made herself interesting to the child.<sup>151</sup> In contrast, Klein immediately interpreted any initial hostility towards her as traceable back to earlier, original objects such as repressed anger towards the child's mother. She felt that it might be beneficial to attract or encourage this negative

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<sup>148</sup> Anna Freud (1895–1982) was Sigmund Freud's daughter and is considered alongside Melanie Klein to be the founder of child psychology.

<sup>149</sup> Melanie Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* (London: Vintage, 1997), 21.

<sup>150</sup> Projection: Projection denotes the attribution of part of the self to an external object or person.

<sup>151</sup> G. Donaldson, "Between Practice and Theory: Melanie Klein, Anna Freud and the Development of Child Analysis," *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences* 32 (1996): 168.

transference<sup>152</sup> in order to be able to address it. Anna Freud later made concessions to Klein, notably on the existence of transference between child and analyst and the value of using this (even if it was negative in character) within the analytical process.<sup>153</sup>

METADATA: Consent; criticism; Anna Freud; Melanie Klein; psychology

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<sup>152</sup> Transference: Transference is the redirection of feelings and desires (related to repressed earlier experiences and relationships) to current persons or objects.

<sup>153</sup> Donaldson, "Between Practice and Theory," 172.

Traditional psychoanalysis,<sup>154</sup> although it has evolved considerably from its early beginnings, still draws on Sigmund Freud's<sup>155</sup> ideas of the ego and the drives inherent within it. *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* represents the emergence of an alternative school of what is now termed "Kleinian psychoanalysis," which rests on an alternative model of the human psyche – that of object relations theory.<sup>156</sup>

The book remains a controversial but relevant part of contemporary debate. Klein's influence is much greater on the work of British, European and South American psychoanalysts than on those in the United States, where Anna Freud's<sup>157</sup> ideas are more embraced, and the school of ego psychology<sup>158</sup> is more dominant. In many countries there has also been pressure to move away from the intense, concentrated (four to five times a week) approach that Klein describes in *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* and a degree of mistrust of some Kleinian methods.

A fundamental difference persists between successors to Anna Freud and Melanie Klein as to how and to what extent the child's external environment influences his or her development and the potential difficulties inherent in unearthing children's deepest feelings, especially their negative or aggressive feelings towards their parents. This continues to influence divergent views on what the role of education should be in child analysis and means that Klein's book might more usefully be seen now as an early exposition of a set of seminal ideas that can inform rather than dictate a range of current psychotherapeutic practice with children.

There is a degree of consensus, however, that in *The Psycho-Analysis of*

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<sup>154</sup> Psychoanalysis: Psychoanalysis is a therapeutic method, originated by Sigmund Freud, for treating mental disorders by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the patient's mind and bringing repressed fears and conflicts into the conscious mind, using techniques such as dream interpretation and free association. (*OED*)

<sup>155</sup> Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was an Austrian neurologist who is known as the father of psychoanalysis. His theories on child sexuality, libido and the ego, among other topics, were some of the most influential academic concepts of the 20th century.

<sup>156</sup> Object relations theory: Object relations theory is a strand of psychoanalytic theory. It can be contrasted with the classical or ego-psychology school, which focuses on the role of instinctual drives in human development. It focuses more on the relationships between the developing self and internal and external objects.

<sup>157</sup> Anna Freud (1895–1982) was Sigmund Freud's daughter and is considered, alongside Melanie Klein, to be the founder of child psychology.

<sup>158</sup> Ego psychology: Ego psychology is rooted in Freud's model of the mind. Proponents of ego psychology focus on the ego's development, its management of impulses, and its adaptation to reality.



*Children* Melanie Klein developed Sigmund Freud's understanding of the unconscious mind by analysing children's play, and began to explore the uncharted territory of the infant mind. Klein's understanding of the child's deepest fears, and his or her defences against them, enabled her later to make original theoretical contributions to psychoanalysis, most notably the "paranoid-schizoid"<sup>159</sup> and "depressive"<sup>160</sup> positions, and show how these primitive mental states impact on the adult.

The ideas in *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* continue to be used to explain a range of mental health problems such as schizophrenia<sup>161</sup> and help those trying to understand aggression, forms of racial and ethnic hatred, homophobia, misogyny<sup>162</sup> and criminal behaviour in young people and adults. As an early post-Freudian contribution to what has become a sizeable canon of object relations theory, it retains its influence, especially within the distinctive British school of psychoanalysis, and challenges others to consider the relational aspects of therapeutic work with children.

METADATA: Criminal behaviour; depressive position; homophobia; Melanie Klein; misogyny; paranoid-schizoid position; psychology; schizophrenia

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<sup>159</sup> Paranoid-schizoid position: The paranoid-schizoid position is a state of mind in children, from birth to four or six months of age, characterised by the fear of invasive malevolence and anxiety about imminent annihilation. Klein posits that the infant deals with this anxiety by splitting off bad feelings and projecting them outwards.

<sup>160</sup> Depressive position: The depressive position is a state of mind where the child ego is able to bring together good and bad feelings towards objects and involves mourning the loss of those that were previously idealised.

<sup>161</sup> Schizophrenia: Schizophrenia is a mental disorder characterised by a breakdown in the relation between thoughts, feelings and actions, a withdrawal from social activity and the occurrence of delusions and hallucinations.

<sup>162</sup> Misogyny: Misogyny is the hatred or dislike of, or prejudice against, women. (*OED*)

It is difficult for the modern reader of *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* to make allowance for what can be perceived as its androcentric,<sup>163</sup> ethnocentric<sup>164</sup> and heterocentric bias.<sup>165</sup> The book is a product of the cultural, social and temporal context in which Klein was writing. It is firmly rooted in Western cultural ideas that assume a universal “self” within a self-contained, autonomous individual who, through reason, can separate emotions from the rational mind.<sup>166</sup> Her firm entrenchment in the white, middle-class European intelligentsia limits the application of her ideas across cultural boundaries, and as a product of an early 20th-century milieu it requires adaptation to the late-modern emphasis on reflexivity, rationality and more testable forms of knowledge.

In the history of the psychoanalytic movement, potent ethno-cultural factors have come to shape its thought and *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* is enmeshed in these Western and middle-class assumptions.<sup>167</sup> The book makes no mention of analysis with non-white patients and what, if anything, this might mean for the interpretation of her ideas in terms of the effects of racism, for instance. Klein’s theoretical explanations of homosexuality in the book could be criticised as pathologising homosexuality and advocating a form of conversion therapy<sup>168</sup> that considers homosexuality as a “curable” disease, which in the light of the American Psychiatric Association’s removal of homosexuality from its list of disorders in 1973 appears out-dated.<sup>169</sup>

It also attracts a strong feminist critique, such as that of Karen Horney,<sup>170</sup> which characterises Klein’s approach to femininity as overly influenced by the

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<sup>163</sup> Androcentrism: Androcentrism is the practice of placing the masculine point of view at the centre of one’s view of the world, culture and history.

<sup>164</sup> Ethnocentrism: Ethnocentrism refers to regarding one’s own race or ethnic group as of the greater importance.

<sup>165</sup> Heterocentrism: Heterocentrism is the belief that heterosexual activities and institutions are better than those with a genderless or homosexual orientation.

<sup>166</sup> For a counter-proposal, see Bruce Hood’s book *The Self Illusion* (London: Constable, 2012).

<sup>167</sup> Rose Marie Perez-Foster, ed., *Reaching Across Boundaries of Culture and Class: Widening the Scope of Psychotherapy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996).

<sup>168</sup> Conversion therapy: Conversion therapy (also known as reparative therapy) is a range of pseudo-scientific treatments that aim to change sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual. It has been a source of intense controversy due to its a priori assumption that the patient should change his or her sexual homosexual orientation.

<sup>169</sup> Tim Dean and Christopher Lane, *Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>170</sup> Karen Horney (1885–1952) was a German psychoanalyst. Her theories of sexuality questioned some traditional Freudian views about inherent differences in the psychology of men and women, and she is credited with founding feminist psychology.

Freudian “anatomy is destiny” outlook.<sup>171</sup> Klein’s contention that there is an underlying biological component in gender formation has been criticised for overemphasising how the physical structure of the female body (including the vagina and clitoris, the impact of menstruation, and so on) determines gender identity: in other words, that it does not sufficiently recognise how gender identity is socially constructed,<sup>172</sup> as argued by gender theorists such as Judith Butler.<sup>173</sup> Arguably, though, Klein’s focus on more emotional and intellectual aspects of development also shed a new light on female sexuality in its own right rather than as a castrated version of male sexuality, and influenced other female analysts to challenge Freud’s ideas.<sup>174</sup>

METADATA: Anatomy is destiny; androcentrism; conversion therapy; ethnocentrism; heterocentrism; Melanie Klein; psychology; social constructionism

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<sup>171</sup> “Anatomy is destiny”: This is the contention by Freud that gender is the primary determinant of main personality traits.

<sup>172</sup> Social construction: To say something is “socially constructed” is to focus on its dependence on variables in the outer social world, rather than any inherent quality that it possesses in itself.

<sup>173</sup> Judith Butler (born 1956) is an American philosopher and gender theorist.

<sup>174</sup> Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974).

Some modern-day thinkers and writers, notably from the feminist tradition, have sought to refocus attention on and reformulate some of Melanie Klein's more neglected ideas. In the 1970s and 1980s, theories of the social construction<sup>175</sup> of gender were perceived as struggling to shed light on why some men and women fail to conform to cultural stereotypes. Some feminist writers, such as Juliet Mitchell<sup>176</sup> and Nancy Chodorow,<sup>177</sup> then sought to reconsider Klein's theories of femininity, to challenge the view that Freud and psychoanalysis had nothing to teach women, and to explore both the unconscious and conscious roots of gendered identity.<sup>178</sup> In 1976, a conference was held by the Women's Movement in London, which led to Klein being taken more seriously by feminist theorists. Susie Orbach<sup>179</sup> at the Women's Therapy Centre in London has also worked with Kleinian ideas. Her book *Fat is a Feminist Issue*<sup>180</sup> describes in detail some of the unconscious phantasies women have about their bodies which influence their eating.

This has led to a reinterpretation of *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* as an empowering book for women. Klein's reformulation of penis envy had sought to detach femininity from the Freudian emphasis on the lack of a penis and move it towards the presence of the breast,<sup>181</sup> and her focus on more emotional and intellectual aspects of development has assumed greater relevance with the changing nature of gender roles in society. She challenged the idea that women should be defined by their lack of a penis and her ideas strengthened those who wished to argue for women's right to assert their rights to control their own bodies. Her findings shed a new light on female sexuality in its own right rather than as a castrated version of male sexuality, and influenced other female analysts such as Karen Horney,<sup>182</sup> Helene

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<sup>175</sup> Social construction: To say something is socially constructed is to focus on its dependence on variables in the outer social world, rather than any inherent quality that it possesses in itself.

<sup>176</sup> Juliet Mitchell (born 1940) is a British psychoanalyst and socialist feminist best known for her book *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974).

<sup>177</sup> Nancy Chodorow (born 1944) is a feminist sociologist and widely regarded as a leading feminist psychoanalyst.

<sup>178</sup> Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Oxford: Pantheon, 1974).

<sup>179</sup> Susie Orbach (born 1946) is a British psychotherapist, writer and social critic. She created the Women's Therapy Centre in 1976.

<sup>180</sup> Susie Orbach, *Fat is a Feminist Issue* (London: Arrow, 1978).

<sup>181</sup> Penis envy: In Freudian psychoanalysis, "penis envy" refers to the theorised reaction of a girl during her psychosexual development to the realisation that she does not have a penis. Freud considered this a defining moment in the development of gender and sexual identity for women.

<sup>182</sup> Karen Horney (1885–1952) was a German psychoanalyst. Her theories of sexuality questioned some traditional Freudian views about inherent differences in the psychology of men and women, and she is credited with founding feminist psychology.

Deutsch<sup>183</sup> and Joan Riviere.<sup>184</sup> More recently, some feminists<sup>185</sup> have argued that efforts to re-engage with Klein's ideas are counterproductive. Others, such as Rosalind Minsky, make a passionate plea for Klein's ideas to be seen as relevant to the alienation and complexity of thought and feeling involved in sex and gender, and also violence and consumerism, in Europe and North America.<sup>186</sup>

Although the ideas developed by Melanie Klein in *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* were pioneering in the field of clinical analysis of children in the early 20th century, the book's impact has become somewhat diminished by the plethora of methodological approaches now in existence. Nevertheless, the ideas continue to be used powerfully to examine a range of issues manifest in late 20th and early 21st century society, such as racism,<sup>187</sup> and the text has been utilised by those interested in understanding the appeal of artistic and cultural forms such as film and literature.<sup>188</sup>

METADATA: Nancy Chodorow; feminism; Karen Horney; Melanie Klein; Rosalind Minsky; Juliet Mitchell; Susie Orbach; psychology

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<sup>183</sup> Helene Deutsch (1884–1982) was an Austrian-American psychoanalyst who is considered to be the first psychoanalyst to specialise in women and female sexuality.

<sup>184</sup> Joan Riviere (1883–1962) was a founding member of the British Psychoanalytic Society who wrote extensively about the sexual development of women.

<sup>185</sup> Ann Hockmeyer, "Object Relations Theory and Feminism: Strange Bedfellows," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 10, no. 8 (1988).

<sup>186</sup> Rosalind Minsky, *Psychoanalysis and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998).

<sup>187</sup> Michael Rustin, *The Good Society and the Inner World* (London: Verso, 1991).

<sup>188</sup> Glen Gabbard, *Psychoanalysis and Film* (London: Karnac, 2001).

*The Psycho-Analysis of Children* contains a number of ideas that would prove important for the future of Melanie Klein's thinking and for psychoanalysis in general – not least to what was to become an identifiable shift towards viewing psychoanalysis as a relational rather than a purely interpretative practice in which two human subjects are involved.<sup>189</sup> It has fuelled a wider intellectual debate around the importance (or unimportance) of early experiences in the development of children, and to what extent children are born with innate predispositions to anxiety or mental health issues. Klein's views on the centrality of the mother–baby relationship and the importance of positive experiences in the first few weeks of life continue to feature in contemporary thinking and psychotherapeutic practice with children, and have led to greater understanding of violence towards women, female psychology and homophobia. The book provides the basis for Klein's later formulation of the paranoid-schizoid<sup>190</sup> and depressive<sup>191</sup> positions in the first six to eight months of life, which both rest conceptually on the presence and interaction of the opposite impulses of love and hate.

Other perspectives, such as attachment disorder<sup>192</sup> and systems theory,<sup>193</sup> sought to modify Klein's ideas and argue for a much stronger role of the external environment in child development. Donald Winnicott's<sup>194</sup> ideas, including that of the “good enough” mother,<sup>195</sup> were influential in disseminating Kleinian ideas to the general public about the importance of maintaining children's earliest relationships with a mother figure. Attachment

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<sup>189</sup> Stephen Frosh, *Brief Introduction to Psychoanalytic Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>190</sup> Paranoid-schizoid position: The paranoid-schizoid position is a state of mind in children, from birth to four or six months of age, characterised by the fear of invasive malevolence and anxiety about imminent annihilation. Klein posits that the infant deals with this anxiety by splitting off bad feelings and projecting them outwards.

<sup>191</sup> Depressive position: The depressive position is a state of mind where the child ego is able to bring together good and bad feelings towards objects and involves mourning the loss of those that were previously idealised.

<sup>192</sup> Attachment disorder: Attachment disorder is a term used to describe maladaptive aspects of personality arising from a failure to form normal attachments to primary caregivers in early childhood.

<sup>193</sup> Systems theory: Systems theory focuses on how people interact with their environment, including their family, neighbourhoods and institutions.

<sup>194</sup> Donald Winnicott (1896–1971) was an English paediatrician and psychoanalyst. He was especially influential in the field of object relations theory. See *Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis* (1975).

<sup>195</sup> “Good enough” mother: The good enough mother is (for Winnicott) one who provides, in her interactions with her baby, a sense of psychological comfort, control and being held securely.

theorists, such as John Bowlby,<sup>196</sup> emphasised the care-giving of actual rather than phantasised objects, and suggested that separation from parents was a major cause of psychological difficulties in later life. The need for children to become attached to primary caregivers and the damaging effect of removal of children from their parents is now widely recognised. Bowlby acknowledged his roots in Kleinian analysis, as did other key figures such as R.D. Laing<sup>197</sup> and Jacques Lacan.<sup>198</sup>

Although Klein viewed group therapy with suspicion, some of those who work with groups use Kleinian ideas, especially those put forward by Wilfred Bion.<sup>199</sup> Bion followed Klein's view that intellectual development is dependent upon emotional development. He felt that the ability to tolerate a degree of disintegration of the socialised self without resorting to defence mechanisms was essential for creative thinking. His theory of thinking introduced the notion of containment,<sup>200</sup> which has become a major concept in psychoanalytic thought and work with groups.

METADATA: Wilfred Bion; John Bowlby; containment; good enough mother; Melanie Klein; Jacques Lacan; R.D. Laing; psychology; Donald Winnicott

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<sup>196</sup> John Bowlby (1907–1990) was a British psychoanalyst notable for his interest in child development and his pioneering work in attachment theory. See *Attachment and Loss*, vols. 1–3 (1969, 1973 and 1980).

<sup>197</sup> R.D. Laing (1927–1989) was a Scottish psychoanalyst who wrote extensively on mental illness, particularly the experience of psychosis.

<sup>198</sup> Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) was a French psychoanalyst. His teachings and writings explore the significance of Freud's theories for psychoanalysis and a range of other disciplines. See Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Russell Grigg (London: W.W. Norton, 2007).

<sup>199</sup> Wilfred Bion (1897–1979) was an influential British psychoanalyst who was president of the British Psychoanalytical Society between 1962 and 1965. See *Elements of Psychoanalysis* (1963).

<sup>200</sup> Containment: The notion of containment derives from Klein's description of projective identification, in which one person can come to contain a part of another, including hostile feelings. It involves another person being able to hold on to those feelings and return them in a more bearable form.

In keeping with Melanie Klein's spirit of bold innovation, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* retains its contemporary relevance for modern-day child and adolescent mental health practitioners and continues to challenge their ideas around how best to approach their practice. It urges them to confront unflinchingly the dualities of love and hate in the lives of children they are seeking to help recover to psychological health. The influence of her ideas is greater in Britain, Europe and South America than in North America, although since the 1970s the work of therapists such as Otto Kernberg (who was born in central Europe and trained in Latin America before moving to North America) has also expanded her influence there. There is a diaspora of other Kleinian-influenced analysts, such as Margaret Mahler, whose work on child psychosis challenged existing ideas of the causes of infant autism.

Contemporary Kleinian analysts would recognise that using Klein's ideas exclusively to explain everything or to avoid uncertainty would be a mistake, and stress the need to keep an open mind and avoid the seeking of proof for pre-formulated theories. Notwithstanding this, her ideas continue to have relevance to the work of counsellors, teachers, nurses, doctors, youth workers and parents. It is now almost universally accepted that, although methods such as analysis on the couch and free association<sup>201</sup> cannot be used with young children, they can be analysed through their play, painting and play-acting.

Klein's ideas continue to aid understanding not only of child and adolescent mental health, but also of wider aspects of culture – crime, violence, sexuality, gender fluidity, father absence and consumerism. Kleinian theory has extended understanding of the psychology of both children and adults who are suffering from depression, anorexia, autism and schizophrenia.<sup>202</sup> Her development of the notion of projective identification<sup>203</sup> still figures largely in psychoanalytical thought and psychotherapeutic practice.<sup>204</sup>

The ideas presented in *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* confront other contemporary methods within the field of counselling and psychotherapy

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<sup>201</sup> Free association: Free association is a technique developed by Freud to analyse mental processes in order to gain insight into subconscious processes. Patients are invited to relate whatever comes into their minds during the analytic session, and not to censor their thoughts.

<sup>202</sup> Janet Sayer, *Kleinians: Psychoanalysis Inside Out* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

<sup>203</sup> Projective identification: Projective identification occurs where bad or unwanted parts of the self are projected outwards onto, and then contaminate, an object.

<sup>204</sup> Robert Caper, *A Mind of One's Own: A Kleinian View of Self and Object* (London: Routledge, 1999).



which focus on learnt behaviour and conscious cognitive processes, such as cognitive behavioural therapy.<sup>205</sup> Klein's ideas offer an alternative approach for those with serious mental health problems such as schizophrenia when other less intrusive methods may only touch the surface. Kleinians argue that as the patient's anxieties are within his or her unconscious, they will not come to the surface on their own without some kind of active intervention. Within the present social, intellectual and economic environment, however, Klein's vision of intense five-times-a-week analysis to achieve this often fails to materialise, or is out of the reach of those without the means to meet the considerable costs involved, both financial and personal.

METADATA: Cognitive behavioural therapy; crime; culture; Melanie Klein; mental health; projective identification; psychology; violence

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<sup>205</sup> Aaron Beck, *Cognitive Theory and the Emotional Disorders* (New York: International Universities Press, 1976). Cognitive behavioural therapy: Cognitive behavioural therapy is a psychotherapeutic approach to addressing dysfunctional behaviour and emotions through the control of thought processes.

As a seminal work in the history of psychoanalytic thought, *The Psychoanalysis of Children* remains part of current intellectual debate within the field of psychology. Related professional fields concerned for the well-being of children, such as social work, education and youth work, are also asking what is the most effective form of therapy to help those suffering from mental health problems, or involved in violence and crime.<sup>206</sup> Some of the criticisms of Melanie Klein can be directed towards psychoanalysis generally; others are specific and focus either on the clinical effectiveness of her ideas or the nature of her underlying theoretical base. The early debates with Anna Freud<sup>207</sup> and with ego psychology<sup>208</sup> have evolved into a wider debate over the relative merits of different approaches to the treatment of people with psychological problems,<sup>209</sup> including the use of pharmaceutical remedies.

Critics of Klein would hold that her interpretations were made too early and in the absence of a therapeutic alliance,<sup>210</sup> that her interpretations were not falsifiable,<sup>211</sup> that they were often far-fetched, and that they were entirely speculative.<sup>212</sup> The attribution of adult content to infant minds implies an interpretative leap based on theoretical assumptions rather than the material presented by the child. From this perspective, Klein is viewed as perceiving adult content in the infant mind in such a way that her ideas cannot be proved or disproved, and as over-privileging unconscious phantasies<sup>213</sup> over real people and real events within the child's environment.

Psychoanalysis continues to attract the criticism from the behaviourist school of psychology<sup>214</sup> that it is "unscientific."<sup>215</sup> Children may in reality be quickly

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<sup>206</sup> Marni Sheehan, "Adolescent Violence: Strategies, Outcomes and Dilemmas in Working with Young People and their Families," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy* 18, no. 2 (1997).

<sup>207</sup> Anna Freud (1895–1982) was Sigmund Freud's daughter and is considered alongside Melanie Klein to be the founder of child psychology.

<sup>208</sup> Ego psychology: Ego psychology is rooted in Freud's model of the mind. Proponents of ego psychology focus on the ego's development, its management of impulses, and its adaptation to reality.

<sup>209</sup> Otto Kernberg, "A Contribution to the Ego Psychological Critique of the Kleinian School," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 50 (1969).

<sup>210</sup> Therapeutic alliance: A therapeutic alliance is a relationship or bond between the analyst and client which involves agreement on the task and goal of the process.

<sup>211</sup> Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations* (New York: Basic Books, 1962).

<sup>212</sup> Adolf Grunbaum, "One Hundred Years of Psychoanalytic Theory and Therapy: Retrospect and Prospect," in *Mindscapes: Philosophy, Science and the Mind* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997).

<sup>213</sup> Phantasies: Phantasies are the mental representation of events in the body; physical sensations that are interpreted as relationships with objects that cause those sensations.

<sup>214</sup> Burrhus Skinner, *About Behaviourism* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1974).

learning the analyst's language and confirming interpretations through a process of reward and reinforcement. Cognitive therapists<sup>216</sup> are more concerned to work with clients' conscious rather than unconscious thoughts, to teach certain skills, and to focus on future behaviour rather than events in the past. It has been suggested that the use of Kleinian ideas within child therapy and social work settings has sometimes led to false sexual abuse accusations as a result of over-interpretation, suggestion and the creation of false memories.

Proponents of humanistic psychology argue that Kleinian theory over-emphasises the influence of people's past on their capacity to choose to change, and insufficiently recognises the role of the intersubjective relationship within therapy: that is, the interplay between analyst and client.<sup>217</sup> Klein's theoretical framework suggests that clarity about boundaries within the relationship is essential, as some children may need to test out their own power and the ability of the therapist to survive attack.

Therapist self-disclosure – that is, the therapist telling the patient more about their own lives and inner world, their successes and failures, and openly expressing their feelings towards the patient – is central to the phenomenon of counter-transference,<sup>218</sup> which has become widely accepted as a concept of technical importance. Paula Heimann<sup>219</sup> argues in her paper "On Counter-transference"<sup>220</sup> that the analyst should openly express his or her feelings towards the patient: "The analyst's emotional response to the patient within the analytic situation represents one of the most important tools for his work. The analyst's counter-transference is an instrument of research into the patient's unconscious."<sup>221</sup> Klein did not approve of this use of transference and this led to an ongoing debate about the extent to which analysts over-attribute their own defensive states of mind to the projections of the client.

METADATA: Boundaries; cognitive behavioural therapy; counter-transference; Paula Heimann; humanistic psychology; Melanie Klein; psychology; self-disclosure

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<sup>215</sup> Jonathon Miller, *States of Mind* (New York: Methuen, 1983).

<sup>216</sup> Aaron Beck, *Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders* (New York: International Universities Press, 1976).

<sup>217</sup> T. Ogden, "The Analytic Third: Implications for Psychoanalytic Theory and Technique," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 73 (2004).

<sup>218</sup> Counter-transference: Counter-transference refers to the analyst's reactions to the client as a result of feelings aroused by significant figures in the analyst's life.

<sup>219</sup> Paula Heimann (1899–1982) was a British psychoanalyst who trained at the Berlin Psychoanalytical Institute and became a close collaborator of Melanie Klein.

<sup>220</sup> Paula Heimann, "On Counter-transference," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 31 (1950).

<sup>221</sup> Heimann, "On Counter-transference," 81.

An identifiable modern-day Kleinian “school” continues to highlight how the interaction of inner and outer reality shapes human life from infancy. When Melanie Klein published *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, several doctors (including Donald Winnicott)<sup>222</sup> who were already dealing in adult and child psychiatry were inspired and attracted by the ideas expressed in the book and sought training with her.<sup>223</sup> Their formal medical training and already-established reputations increased Kleinian theory’s standing in a range of other institutions, as well as providing Klein with a rich source of material with which she could go on to develop her ideas. Then after the Second World War a number of other young doctors, including Hanna Segal,<sup>224</sup> Herbert Rosenfeld,<sup>225</sup> Wilfred Bion<sup>226</sup> and later Donald Meltzer,<sup>227</sup> continued to push forward Kleinian thought.

From the mid-1940s, Klein’s colleagues and supporters formed separate groups. Her earliest supporters were leading members of the British Psycho-Analytical Society such as Ernest Jones<sup>228</sup> and Edward Glover,<sup>229</sup> who decided to adopt Klein despite the opposition to her views abroad (Glover later withdrew his support). Other adherents, such as Joan Riviere,<sup>230</sup> Susan Isaacs<sup>231</sup> and Paula Heimann,<sup>232</sup> remained loyal up to the war years and

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<sup>222</sup> Donald Winnicott (1896–1971) was an English paediatrician and psychoanalyst. He was especially influential in the field of object relations theory. See *Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis* (1975).

<sup>223</sup> David Smith, *Approaching Psychoanalysis: An Introductory Course* (London: Karnac, 1999), 144.

<sup>224</sup> Hannah Segal (1918–2011) was a psychoanalyst and president of the British Psychoanalytic Society. She was a follower of Melanie Klein and wrote several introductory works.

<sup>225</sup> Herbert Rosenfeld (1910–1986) was born in Germany but worked in Britain as a psychoanalyst. He made seminal contributions to Kleinian thinking on mental illness.

<sup>226</sup> Wilfred Bion (1897–1979) was an influential British psychoanalyst who was president of the British Psychoanalytical Society between 1962 and 1965. See *Elements of Psychoanalysis* (1963).

<sup>227</sup> Donald Meltzer (1922–2004) was a Kleinian psychoanalyst known for making clinical headway with difficult childhood conditions such as autism.

<sup>228</sup> Alfred Ernest Jones (1879–1958) was a British psychoanalyst and Sigmund Freud’s official biographer. He was the first English-speaking psychoanalyst, founded the British Psychoanalytical Society in 1919 and was its president in the 1920s and 1930s.

<sup>229</sup> Edward Glover (1888–1972) was a British psychoanalyst and an influential member of the British Psychoanalytical Society. He is notable for his combined work within the fields of psychotherapy and criminology.

<sup>230</sup> Joan Riviere (1883–1962) was a founding member of the British Psychoanalytic Society who wrote extensively about the sexual development of women.

<sup>231</sup> Susan Isaacs (1885–1948) was a Lancashire-born educational psychologist and psychoanalyst. She published studies on the intellectual and social development of children and promoted the nursery school movement.

shortly after. This group was responsible for much of the work around the nature of phantasies,<sup>233</sup> object relations theory<sup>234</sup> and the theory of the depressive position.<sup>235</sup>

Heimann was a crucial protagonist in the “Controversial Discussions,”<sup>236</sup> where she sought to clarify Kleinian concepts. She was also especially influential in the development of the notion of counter-transference,<sup>237</sup> which led to an ongoing debate about the extent to which analysts over-attribute their own defensive states of mind to the projections of the client. Klein reportedly asked Heimann to withdraw her paper on counter-transference in 1950, possibly because it contained no reference to her. Other pupils include Betty Joseph,<sup>238</sup> who has also made creative and original psychoanalytic contributions.

In the late 1940s, Esther Bick,<sup>239</sup> with the support of John Bowlby,<sup>240</sup> founded the Tavistock Clinic. Bick wanted to see if child analytic work could be brought to the new National Health Service and convinced Melanie Klein that it was possible to conduct authentic psychoanalytic therapy for children who were seen less frequently than five times per week. With her blessing the first training course using her technique was started. It has continued ever since and is now the largest child psychotherapy training programme in the UK. Klein’s corpus of work has given rise to a vibrant post-Kleinian tradition, not only in the UK but in North America too, through the work of contemporary

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<sup>232</sup> Paula Heimann (1899–1982) was a British psychoanalyst who trained at the Berlin Psychoanalytical Institute and became a close collaborator of Melanie Klein.

<sup>233</sup> Phantasies: Phantasies are the mental representation of events in the body; physical sensations that are interpreted as relationships with objects that cause those sensations.

<sup>234</sup> Object relations theory: Object relations theory is a strand of psychoanalytic theory. It can be contrasted with the classical or ego-psychology school, which focuses on the role of instinctual drives in human development. It focuses more on the relationships between the developing self and internal and external objects.

<sup>235</sup> Depressive position: The depressive position is a state of mind where the child ego is able to bring together good and bad feelings towards objects and involves mourning the loss of those that were previously idealised.

<sup>236</sup> “Controversial Discussions”: A series of meetings of the British Psychoanalytical Society which took place between 1942 and 1944 between the Viennese school and the supporters of Melanie Klein. They led to a tripartite division of training in the society between Kleinians, Freudians and the Middle or later Independent Group.

<sup>237</sup> Counter-transference: Counter-transference refers to the analyst’s reactions to the client as a result of feelings aroused by significant figures in the analyst’s life.

<sup>238</sup> Betty Joseph (1917–2013) was a training analyst and child analyst in the British Psychoanalytical Society. She was one of the leading Kleinian thinkers of her generation.

<sup>239</sup> Esther Bick (1902–1983) founded the child psychotherapy training course at the Tavistock Clinic. Her interest in very early infantile states of mind and the relationships between babies and their primary carers enriched the psychoanalytic understanding of infantile anxieties and defences.

<sup>240</sup> John Bowlby (1907–1990) was a British psychoanalyst notable for his interest in child development and his pioneering work in attachment theory. See *Attachment and Loss*, vols. 1–3 (1969, 1973 and 1980).

American analysts such as Otto Kernberg.<sup>241</sup> John Steiner has argued that psychological health depends on integrating what we externalise on to others,<sup>242</sup> and Kleinian theory is increasingly being integrated with other disciplines such as sociology to produce psychosocial perspectives on a range of contemporary psychological and societal ills.<sup>243</sup>

METADATA: Esther Bick; Paula Heimann; Melanie Klein; Donald Meltzer; psychology; Herbert Rosenfeld; Hannah Segal; Tavistock Clinic

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<sup>241</sup> Otto Kernberg (born 1928) is a psychoanalyst and professor of psychiatry at Weill Cornell Medical College. He is most widely known for his psychoanalytic theories on borderline personality organisation and narcissistic pathology, and has been central in integrating postwar ego psychology with Kleinian and other object relations perspectives.

<sup>242</sup> John Steiner, *Psychic Retreats: Pathological Organisations in Psychotic, Neurotic and Borderline Patients* (London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>243</sup> David Gadd and Tony Jefferson, *Psychosocial Criminology* (London: Sage, 2007).

*The Psycho-Analysis of Children* forms an integral part of a body of knowledge that has been explored and adapted by scholars in other disciplines. Melanie Klein was able to illuminate how adult mental illness had its roots in childhood experience. Her work has been used to help explain a range of features of modern culture such as crime, violence,<sup>244</sup> male violence against women<sup>245</sup> and consumerism.<sup>246</sup>

Kleinian theory also sheds light on the portrayal of women in culture as Madonnas, witches or whores and men as knights in shining armour, and children's stories that have a split, schizoid nature (witches, wolves, and so on). The cannibalistic witch in "Hansel and Gretl" and the wolf in "Red Riding Hood" are interpreted as having roots in children's phantasies<sup>247</sup> about their mother that may have occurred during the oral stage. Kleinian psychoanalysis is also becoming integrated with notions of spirituality and religion,<sup>248</sup> a development that would almost certainly have surprised Klein herself.

Contemporary distrust of Klein's work outside of the psychoanalytic field (and especially from the medical profession) continues to this day. It stands accused of being unscientific, as illustrated by the following assessment: "After nearly eighty years psychoanalysis has failed to arrive at anything which one could properly call consensus, and the vehemence with which the various schools disagree with one another has led some of the more uncharitable sceptics to conclude that the Freudian enterprise should be classified as religious dogma and not as scientific theory. In which case the contribution made by Melanie Klein must surely be considered as one of its most interesting and influential heresies."<sup>249</sup>

In Klein's defence, Hannah Segal has suggested that Klein's ideas of the primacy of phantasies involving guilt, dependence, care for others and the destructiveness of envy and greed clash with North American ideas about the

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<sup>244</sup> Arthur Hyatt Williams, "Brutalisation or Civilisation," paper presented at a conference on psychoanalysis and the young adult, Cambridge Psychoanalytic Forum, Cambridge, June, 1996.

<sup>245</sup> Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, *Sexuality and the Mind: The Role of the Father and the Mother in the Psyche* (New York: New York University Press, 1986).

<sup>246</sup> Rosalind Minsky, *Psychoanalysis and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 198.

<sup>247</sup> Phantasies: Phantasies are the mental representation of events in the body; physical sensations that are interpreted as relationships with objects that cause those sensations.

<sup>248</sup> Neville Symington, *The Spirit of Sanity* (London: Karnac, 2001).

<sup>249</sup> Jonathon Miller, *States of Mind* (New York: Methuen, 1983).

primacy of the self.<sup>250</sup>

METADATA: Fairy tales; Melanie Klein; male violence; mental illness;  
psychology; religion; science

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<sup>250</sup> Hannah Segal, *Melanie Klein* (London: Sage, 1995), 103.



The core ideas expressed in *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* have influenced the thinking of professionals in a range of related fields such as medicine, social work and teaching. Melanie Klein's ideas have been used to humanise how organisations such as hospitals, schools and prisons work, by breaking down professional "them and us" attitudes to the users of the services, and dealing with problems of authority, dependency, control and anxiety.<sup>251</sup>

Klein's ideas have permeated the practice of those involved in therapeutic work with individuals suffering from shock as the result of trauma which may have occurred as part of their involvement in armed conflict or natural disasters, either as victims or as members of the military or emergency services. Memories of such traumatic events can remain unassimilated in psychotic pockets in the psyche and can, as suggested by Klein's work with children, be released through the drawing, writing or re-enacting of events. Bion's<sup>252</sup> theory of alpha and beta elements<sup>253</sup> helps explain how the re-experiencing of these feelings in a safe situation with someone who will not judge the person for actions taken under extreme conditions (that is, who is able to "contain" them)<sup>254</sup> can avoid the individual "taking out" these feelings on others.

Klein often remains misunderstood, as the general public's initial reaction to her concepts is that they have no memories of hating their mother, being afraid of their own aggression, wanting to have sex with their mother and to kill their father, and so on. Klein maintained that these experiences are not accessible to the conscious mind, but any effort to convince those who are sceptical of her theories is faced with the fact that their acceptance relies more on subjective experience than on objective verification.

Notwithstanding this scepticism, aspects of Klein's ideas have entered

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<sup>251</sup> Isabel Menzies-Lyth, *Containing Anxiety in Institutions: Selected Essays* (London: Free Association Books, 1988).

<sup>252</sup> Wilfred Bion (1897–1979) was an influential British psychoanalyst who was president of the British Psychoanalytical Society between 1962 and 1965. See *Elements of Psychoanalysis* (1963).

<sup>253</sup> Alpha and beta elements: Alpha elements are those able to be thought and given meaning, whilst beta elements are impressions and sense data that are not experienced within the psyche but felt within the body.

<sup>254</sup> Containment: The notion of containment derives from Klein's description of projective identification, in which one person can come to contain a part of another, including hostile feelings. It involves another person being able to hold on to those feelings and return them in a more bearable form.

people's awareness, such as the notion of "acting out" phantasies,<sup>255</sup> the "child in the adult," or the commonly-held notion of "kicking the cat," whereby a reaction to a bad day, intense guilt or some other unpleasant experience is forcibly ejected from oneself on to another object, as it cannot be borne by the subject. Part of the more general influence of Klein on everyday life has been on attitudes to grief and mourning. Klein was clear that depressive feelings were a sign of work being done and should not be ignored or cut short. Rather, they should be viewed as an essential part of a process (reparation) that leads to the ability to tolerate the pain of loss.<sup>256</sup>

METADATA: Acting out; alpha and beta elements; grief counselling; Melanie Klein; organisations; post-traumatic stress; psychology

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<sup>255</sup> Phantasies: Phantasies are the mental representation of events in the body; physical sensations that are interpreted as relationships with objects that cause those sensations.

<sup>256</sup> Stephen Frosh, *A Brief Introduction to Psychoanalytic Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 147.

Despite changing times and circumstances, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* continues to endure as an influential and well-regarded text. There is little or no sign that the book will cease to be seen as a seminal text in the study of children and adults with mental health problems. It is likely that it will continue to influence the training and practice of both child and adult psychoanalysts and psychotherapists.

According to Anthony Holder, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* “contains a number of theoretical concepts that can facilitate our understanding of the intrapsychic dynamics of our adult patients too. These include, for example, the concept of projective identification as a normal mechanism of development or as a pathological defence mechanism; the distinguishing of an early paranoid-schizoid and a later depressive position ... Even if not all Klein’s hypotheses concerning the earliest stages of development and intrapsychic mechanisms and processes are accepted ... her concepts and developmental theories ... have enormously enriched and fructified both psychoanalytic thought and the clinical understanding of adult patients over the last eighty years.”<sup>257</sup>

Book sales are one way of judging to what extent a book will be enduringly influential. The *Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein* by Hannah Segal, which came out in 1964, still sells, and so do the books and papers written by Klein herself, although it is not possible to say in what quantity.

However, a number of factors present challenges to the ongoing practice of child analysis as Klein envisaged, such as the demands of the technique on parents and the child’s mistrust and fear that disclosures will be passed on to parents or carers. Kleinian therapists need to be able to withstand children’s tendency to act out their phantasies<sup>258</sup> more unpredictably (and possibly aggressively or violently) than adults, and appreciate the necessity of placing oneself in the child’s world (and thereby re-immersing oneself in one’s own childhood). The strain on the therapist of the greater responsibility encountered when working with children, the cost of intensive analytic treatment and the time commitment involved for the family mean that its availability is often restricted to the most serious cases.

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<sup>257</sup> Anthony Holder, *Anna Freud, Melanie Klein and the Psychoanalysis of Children and Adolescents* (London: Karnac, 2005), 200.

<sup>258</sup> Phantasies: Phantasies are the mental representation of events in the body; physical sensations that are interpreted as relationships with objects that cause those sensations.

In the UK, the preferred mode of therapy for children is cognitive behavioural therapy,<sup>259</sup> mainly because of time and cost, both in terms of training therapists and the analysis process itself.<sup>260</sup> Psychotherapy with children, especially in Britain, although influenced by Kleinian ideas, increasingly cross-fertilises with these alternative explanations of human behaviour. It is likely that disciples of Klein's ideas will continue to challenge the contemporary understanding of the impacts of abuse on children and young people, and conditions such as autism<sup>261</sup> and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD),<sup>262</sup> by seeking to counter the dominant psychiatric and medical explanations of such conditions.

METADATA: ADHD; autism; child psychotherapy; cognitive behavioural therapy; humanistic psychology; Melanie Klein; psychology

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<sup>259</sup> Cognitive behavioural therapy: Cognitive behavioural therapy is a psychotherapeutic approach to addressing dysfunctional behaviour and emotions through the control of thought processes.

<sup>260</sup> Stephen Frosh, *A Brief Introduction to Psychoanalytic Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>261</sup> Autism: Autism is a developmental disorder characterised by impaired social interaction and verbal and non-verbal communication, and by restricted, repetitive or stereotyped behaviour.

<sup>262</sup> ADHD: ADHD is a psychiatric disorder in which there are significant problems of attention or hyperactivity and acting impulsively that are not appropriate for a person's age.

Many analysts, thinkers and academics are continuing to contribute to the Kleinian body of thought.<sup>263</sup> Interest in training “as a Kleinian” has grown, leading to a small group of Klein-orientated analysts developing in North America. However, the influence of Kleinian ideas has been felt more widely in the work of British, European and South American analysts, possibly because more analysts of the Viennese school moved to America. The ideas of the school of ego psychology might also fit better with American ideas about the primacy of the self than with Klein’s ideas of guilt and the destructiveness of envy and greed.<sup>264</sup>

In the UK, the Tavistock Clinic<sup>265</sup> has been influential in training psychotherapists, and the Institute of Marital Studies within the Tavistock Clinic has influenced the training of Relate<sup>266</sup> counsellors. Modern-day psychoanalytic institutes and child psychotherapy organisations all over the world continue to use Melanie Klein’s techniques, amongst a range of other methods. Usual practice in child analysis today reflects the coming together of a range of theoretical perspectives that incorporate the ideas expressed in *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, as well as the criticisms made of it. The analyst may begin the process of analysis immediately, include no educational elements, be an active partner with the child and become involved in his or her play activity and role play – in line with Klein’s views. However, the emphasis on a positive “therapeutic alliance” is more prevalent in modern-day practice, along with an acknowledgment that a child’s initial behaviour in analysis (such as hostility towards, or fear of, someone new to them) may be to do with their anxieties concerning their surroundings and experience in the present situation or moment, rather than being traceable back to earlier, original objects.<sup>267</sup>

A number of centres now exist that offer training in child psychoanalysis, including to people with no prior training in adult analysis. For example, in the United Kingdom, the wish to spread child analytic work beyond London led to the establishment of the Scottish Institute of Human Relations in Edinburgh,

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<sup>263</sup> Among these analysts, thinkers and academics are Robin Anderson, Eric Brenman, Irma Brenman Pick, James Grotstein, Robert Hinshelwood, Sydney Klein, Roger Money-Kyrle, Edna O’Shaughnessy, Jean-Michel Quinodoz, Heinrich Racker, Elias da Rocha Barros, and Ignes Sodre.

<sup>264</sup> Julia Segal, *Melanie Klein* (London: Sage, 1992), 103.

<sup>265</sup> The Tavistock Clinic is a psychiatric clinic in London founded in 1920.

<sup>266</sup> Relate: Relate is a charity providing relationship support. Services include counselling for couples, families, young people and individuals, sex therapy, mediation and training courses.

<sup>267</sup> Stephen Frosh, *A Brief Introduction to Psychoanalytic Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 9.

and more recently to the establishment of the Northern School of Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy and the Birmingham Trust for Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy.

METADATA: Melanie Klein; psychology; Relate counselling; Tavistock Clinic

*The Psycho-Analysis of Children* deserves special attention because it detailed for the first time what was, in 1932, a genuinely new way to work psychoanalytically with young children – the use of play. Its author, Melanie Klein, was a true innovator. It could be said that child analysis as it exists today evolved primarily out of the early writings of Melanie Klein and, despite her differing approach, Anna Freud.<sup>268</sup> *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* remains essential reading for child psychotherapists, child psychoanalysts and educational psychologists, as well as students and professionals from a range of disciplines involved in the management, care and treatment of children and adolescents.

Julia Segal claims that “Melanie Klein was one of the most creative thinkers of the 20th century. Her insights into the emotional life of children grew out of her experience as a mother enlightened by her own analysis and her reading of [Sigmund] Freud.”<sup>269</sup> She has given us permission to see our children as feeding, thinking beings rather than as a bundle of instincts.”<sup>270</sup>

Klein’s concepts may have emerged out of earlier classical Freudian ego psychology,<sup>271</sup> but her theory and technique were eventually so distinctively different from Freud’s that they became an independent school in their own right. She argued that from the moment of birth the baby is plunged into a desperate conflict between alternating emotions. In this, her first major work, Klein put in place some of the first building blocks of our understanding about children and young people’s unconscious life, and the basis of psychotherapeutic attempts to treat mental health. She engaged with children at a time when they were re-enacting, in the present moment, traumatic events in their lives. For Klein, play was not just about amusement; it was a way in which children could relate to themselves and deal with their worst fears and anxieties. This has had a profound impact on adult psychoanalysis too, whereby interpretation of here-and-now events in the consulting room and in the relationship between client and therapist have come to be seen as important. Klein’s work also forms the bedrock of an emphasis within

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<sup>268</sup> Anna Freud (1895–1982) was Sigmund Freud’s daughter and is considered alongside Melanie Klein to be the founder of child psychology.

<sup>269</sup> Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was an Austrian neurologist who is known as the father of psychoanalysis. His theories on child sexuality, libido and the ego, among other topics, were some of the most influential academic concepts of the 20th century.

<sup>270</sup> Julia Segal, *Melanie Klein* (London: Sage, 1995), 134.

<sup>271</sup> Ego psychology: Ego psychology is rooted in Freud’s model of the mind. Proponents of ego psychology focus on the ego’s development, its management of impulses, and its adaptation to reality.

psychotherapy on seeing the “child in the adult” during analysis.

Klein never altered the technical principles laid down in *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*. It remains her foundational work on child analysis and has the potential to remain important in efforts to understand the ongoing social as well as psychological problems affecting children and young people.

METADATA: Child psychoanalysis; Melanie Klein; psychology



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