

A Kleinian theory of sexuality

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Introduction

Freud's discovery of infantile sexuality stands as a cornerstone of psychoanalytic theory with its special disposition of polymorphous perversion regulated by the interplay of the pleasure-unpleasure and the reality principle. According to Laplanche (1976) the drive *is* sexuality – which Freud generalised to all forms of human satisfaction from orality as the prototype to mountain climbing to intellectual pursuits.

Some years ago claims appeared in the literature bemoaning the marginalisation and in some instances the disappearance of sexuality from psychoanalysis. Leading the field was Green (1996, 1997, 2000) who in a Sigmund Freud birthday lecture presented at the Anna Freud Centre in April 1995 asserted that Freud's inheritors had reduced the importance of sexuality in psychoanalysis resulting in a desexualisation of classical theory. The main culprits, according to Green, were the British Object Relations theorists – Balint, Fairbairn, Winnicott and especially Klein. Their 'feminisation' of theory by emphasising the role of the pre-genital mother and the mother-infant relationship had displaced sexuality from the epicentre of psychoanalysis. In reifying the pregenital, Klein, in particular, achieved a double sin – she 'raised the breast to a supreme position' (1996, p. 877) by extending the breast model to the genital phase, with the result that 'the penis was seen a giving and feeding organ, in other words a breast. Implicitly fellatio was the nearest approximation to a fully satisfying sexual relationship.' (p. 877). In addition, she substituted sexuality with aggression as a salient feature of her theoretical scheme. Unfortunately for Fairbairn he was mocked for practicing analysis from behind a desk – evidence of his removing sexuality for the consulting room (1996, p. 879) even though it was Fairbairn who made the following enlightening clarification on the relationship between sex function and love:

The important point about the mature individual is not that the libidinal attitude is essentially genital, but that the genital attitude is essentially libidinal ... It is in virtue of the fact that satisfactory object relationships have been established that true genitality is attained (1952, p. 22).

By 1997 Green was less trapped in the headlights of his Freud Birthday lecture and his arguments became less polemical and more systematic. He located his charges of desexualisation in the metapsychological imbalances between Freud's drive theory and Object Relations' theory and suggested that a way forward should be found to integrate the ideas of Klein, Winnicott and Bion with Freud's libido theory.

It is virtually impossible to arrive at a unifying conception of the object not only because of *conflicting* theories but because there is always more than one object. (my italics) (1997, p. 346)

But Green was not hopeful, especially about the theories of Melanie Klein, which he stated was such ‘a radical modification’ of drive theory that an integration may not be possible (1997, p. 346). Principal among these modifications are (i) that libido pursues an object directly for satisfaction (ii) that libido encompasses emotion and therefore is not solely governed by the demand of the drive (iii) that object love initially expresses itself in part-object relations and is therefore not confined to genital love. Green concludes that owing to these modifications archaic sexuality is given priority over Oedipal sexuality with the result that sexuality as we know it disappears from the clinical sensibility of the analyst. This trend is reinforced by the replacement of Freud’s ‘repression’ with ‘projective identification’ (p. 348). While Green agrees that Object Relations theories have contributed to a new treatment climate in which regressed pathologies (borderline, narcissistic, character disorders etc), as opposed to neurosis, are more prominent, he claims that the aetiopathogenic role of sexuality in these non-neurotic disorders is ‘more diverse and more complicated’ and ‘less obvious’ (p. 347).

Green’s conclusion is that the metapsychological differences between drive theory and Object Relations theory produce ‘conflicting’ theories – but the reader may wish to compare his views with other statements in the literature that focus specifically on contrasting drive theory with Kleinian theory. These suggest a greater variety in the relationship between the two – ambiguity (Mackay 1981), expansion (Wisdom 1981; Parsons 2000), conceptual parity (Sandler 1988), bridgeability (Kernberg 1993), complementarity (Maze 1993) – while Greenberg & Mitchell (1983) in their exhaustive review of the matter thought there was no point in seeking an integration. The reader may also like to consult Meltzer’s (1981) Freud Memorial Lecture where he argued in favour of a continuity between Klein and Freud’s model of the mind.

Charges of desexualisation of psychoanalytic theory

But what is to be made of claims of desexualisation? How are they to be assessed, especially when they concern practice? Are they grounded in academic rigor or are they simply a jeremiad, or a polemic? Can it be true, firstly, that Object Relations theorists have contributed minimally to our understanding of sexuality and the part it plays in both healthy and false adult functioning? Was not the birth of Object Relations theory tied to the discovery by Abraham (1924b) of the part-object, a concept that doubled Freud’s phases of erogenous zone primacy in a way that has vastly enriched and elaborated our knowledge of genital sexuality? And given the foundational importance ascribed to early infant development in the British Psychoanalytic Society has not the Object Relations movement, subsequently, been engaged in an exhaustive clarification of the links between part- and whole- objects in the analytic process – and in determining their implications for sexual states of mind? Secondly, how has Kleinian analysis removed sexuality from the consulting room?

Some of these claims of a desexualised theory have been echoed uncritically by a number of commentators such as Budd (2001), Stein (1998), Dimen (1999), Celenza (2000) and others. Budd (2001 p. 63) takes the argument further – that under Object

Relations theory a style of analytic treatment was born that was limited to analysing mother–infant transferences, that were largely desexualised. All patients were thereby turned into ‘babies’ under the assumption that if the baby’s object relations could be sorted out there would be no sexuality problems (p. 64). It follows that patients who undergo such an analysis will rarely have to engage with adult sexuality issues. Is such a thing possible – to go through an analysis without encountering the place of sexuality in one’s adult love relations? Dimen (1999) repeated the claim of desexualisation, attributing it to the shift from drive theory to Object Relations’ theory – ‘where libido was there shall objects be’.

This statement at least suggests that what Object Relations theory does is to correlate Freud’s infantile sexuality to adult sexuality in a new way – an argument supported by two lone, dissenting voices against the charges of desexualisation (Parsons 2000; Litowitz 2002). Litowitz (pp. 172, 180) points out that sexuality is not absent in psychoanalysis today but is more present than ever before because the basic unit of psychoanalysis is no longer limited to drive/repression, but includes enactments where the repressed is knowable through direct communication. This she argues widens the pathways for the ‘grammar of desire’.

Parsons (2000, p. 46), writing from within the Independent tradition, agrees that the shift from the drive to the object has meant a change in conceptualisation of sexuality, but not a break with sexuality. He claims there have been special gains, particularly in defining pathological sexuality, from a shift in focus from the object determined by the drive to the quality of the object relationship as determined by the states of mind of subject and object. I agree with his perspective and in this paper, using Kleinian terminology, I shall be elaborating in further detail on the critical role of the object relationship, and the qualitative states of mind of subject and object, in a general Object Relations theory of sexuality.

Unfortunately as the claims of desexualisation took hold an element of tendentiousness crept into the debate in the way it began to resemble a national contest between French and Anglo-Saxon psychoanalysis – as captured in the title of one text on this topic – ‘No sex please – we’re British’. Can anyone really tell whether the French are better at sexuality than the English? Or whether the Brits are better than the French at figure skating or cross-channel swimming?

Perhaps a more useful engagement with this ‘debate’ is to delineate a Kleinian theory of sexuality and its implications for practice. By a Kleinian theory of sexuality I specifically mean the theory of sexuality put forward by Donald Meltzer in his 1973 book ‘Sexual States of Mind’. To this day this text remains a primer for Kleinian theories on sexuality not only at the Tavistock Clinic but also at many centres of Kleinian psychoanalysis around the world – because it is the only comprehensive Kleinian or Post-Kleinian text devoted to this purpose. Meltzer’s explicit goal was a structural revision of psychoanalytic sexual theory from an Object Relations perspective. This makes his project particularly relevant to claims of desexualisation by Object Relations theorists/practitioners generally, and Kleinians’ in particular. In selecting Meltzer’s text

though I am not suggesting that it represents the thinking of all Kleinians' on the subject of sexuality, nor would it characterise theories of sexuality held by other groupings within the British Object Relations tradition. But Green singled out Meltzer as well for criticism, stating that he too reduced the entire sexual experience to finding a fully satisfying breast (Green 1996, p. 880).

The main purpose of this paper therefore is a rebuttal of claims of desexualisation ascribed to Object Relations theory in general and Kleinian theory in particular. In making this rebuttal a number of counter-claims will be made

- (i) that a theory of sexuality exists in the working life clinicians utilising this Kleinian approach through which the diverse features of sexuality can be given a very detailed understanding
- (ii) that Meltzer's concept of 'sexual states of mind' provides a conceptual framework for thinking about the inner world in sexual terms – including the erotic world of the mother/infant relationship
- (iii) that beginning earlier in the psychosexuality of the individual, which involves psychic mechanisms older than repression, does not lead to the erasing of sexuality but the opposite – advocating a unified, developmentally-based theory for neurotic and non-neurotic functioning that can draw the sorts of clinical distinctions between immature, polymorphous and perverse sexuality that are relevant for defining what counts as sexual health and pathology today
- (iv) that the desexualisation of psychoanalytic theory that is attributed to the discovery of mechanisms of defence more primitive than repression is an exaggeration, and that terms like binary splitting and projective identification can be utilised without sacrificing the idea of the ubiquity of sexuality; nor supplanting drive/repression as a basic unit of psychoanalysis; nor neglecting the contrast between neurosis and perversion
- (v) that, on the contrary, these primitive mechanisms have added new and subtle ways of interpreting the sexual dimension to human affairs as they are revealed in the consulting room
- (vi) that if there is a turning away from sexuality in psychoanalysis it is not *because* of Object Relations' theory but because of the greater complexity in conceptualising sexuality today on account of Object Relations theories. But with complexity in mind we must first turn to Klein.

Melanie Klein's theory of sexual development.

Klein's theory of sexuality can be derived from three sources – her contributions on female sexuality (1932, Ch. 11), the role she ascribed to the pre-genital mother in the life of the infant (1937) and her theory of an early Oedipus complex and its relation to the depressive position (1945). Klein contended that both the boy and the girl experience genital sensations and impulses from the beginning that are not the sole result of the

mother' bodily care – they stem from an unconscious knowledge of a penis and a vagina (Klein 1945 p. 409). This knowledge of anatomical distinctions generates unconscious phantasies about gender difference that enter the register of infantile sexuality initially through the medium of part-object orality – in its libidinal and aggressive dimensions. Experiences of frustration, but also satisfying experiences in the part-object relationship with the breast, lead the infant, in phantasy, to turn to other sources including the nipple-penis (p. 408). Hence the penis 'belongs' initially to the mother, as the object of primary identification, and is kept inside her along with her other attributes, positive and negative. The first fear of the penis therefore is of the one inside the mother – acting says Klein as an embryonic superego (p. 411).

The oral desire for a penis is a precursor of a correspondent relation between the vagina and the penis, which comprises the primitive coital relation of internal parents. To illustrate the specific nature of this early coital relation Klein uses the term 'combined object' (Klein 1932 p. 246). This combined parental figure, initially, is one involving part-objects and hence their fusion or confusion contributes to its frightening effects. As Freud had observed, childish conceptions of coitus were sadistic and in the analysis of small children Klein discovered ample examples in primal scene play material of frightening images of ripping, beating, cutting, poisoning by exchange of faeces and so on – owing, as she concluded, to projections of sadistic-oral and anal elements into the parental coitus (1927b, p. 175). She also observed that where such sadistic phantasies were not carried through to adult sexuality as criminal sexual acts they could play a significant role in sexual disturbance like frigidity and impotence (Klein 1927b p. 176).

These are all really Freud's ideas – the model of orality for adult sexuality that extends aspects of the breast model to the genital phase; the unconscious knowledge of coitus; and the 'primal phantasy' of parental coitus as sadistic. Where Klein reached a different formulation was through (i) her ideas about female sexuality, notably the girl's unconscious knowledge of her vagina (ii) the timing and dynamics of psychosexual phases coupled with the importance given by Karl Abraham to part-object organisation and (iii) the fusion of sexuality with aggression (Klein 1933 p. 253).

The crucial task now waiting the infant, of great importance for future sexuality, is the integration of these pre-genital internal object relations into emerging genitality. According to Klein, this integration organises itself around the shift from part-object to whole-object relations that begins after weaning and is extant throughout the second half of the first year of life (Klein 1924, p. 55). With this and other successive shifts towards near-whole or whole-objects the infant develops the capacity to identify with the object, that casts the object in a new light – as separate. Consequently sexual and sensual impulses immediately gain a new significance on two levels. Firstly, they counter aggressive and self-gratificatory cravings thereby inaugurating feelings of tenderness, concern and a *realistic* idealisation of the object. (Klein 1937, p. 314). Secondly, reciprocal identifications become possible based a better integration of positive and negative feelings, leading to a capacity for mutual excitement as well as empathy – a factor that intensifies sexual pleasure in love relations (1937, p. 315). But apart from establishing the theoretical basis for an intimate relationship, the shift to whole object

relations has its most decisive effect on the integration of pre-genital and genital love by forcing the ‘combined object’ imago to give way to a conscious differentiation of the parents into single, polarised figures, male and female (Klein 1952, pp. 79,197).

This is groundbreaking by virtue of being based on an awareness of a genital difference. In other words, the perception of the mother as an individual comes into focus around an awareness of anatomical difference between the parents. The fear is now of the penis outside the mother. The psychological effect of this, according to Klein, is to set in motion the Oedipus complex in a preliminary form – from which she would conclude that the onset of Oedipus ‘constellation’ and the infantile depressive position go hand in hand (Klein 1932, xiv). With the so-called ‘mature’ version of the Oedipus complex (Freud’s version) a further differentiation of the ‘combined object’ imago into single figures occurs within the existing but more conscious awareness of male and female figures – one figure becomes a libidinal object and the other an object of hatred (1932, p. 246). Guilt in a true sense now replaces fear as the expression of a florescent superego. Achieving a synthesis of these figures, further differentiated by ripening affect, establishes a template of a complementary genital relationship that is part of a personal object choice.

At puberty the whole process is revisited. Spurred on by sexual maturity the ‘combined object’ of pre-genitality re-enters the picture regressively and has to undergo a fresh transformation into male and female elements – on this occasion their integration forming the basis of an adult genital identification. What I would like to emphasise is that a successful outcome in this theory of sexual development involves the ‘combined object’ of pre-genitality undergoing successive phases of decoupling in order to achieve a progressively higher level of genital integration – an epigenetic concept (see Klein 1932, p. 79 & 253).

In summary, the importance of the infantile depressive position concept is in tracing Oedipal sexuality to its origins in pre-genital sexuality, by delineating how unconscious male and female elements emerge consciously in the psyche as a result of the infant’s separation from its primary object (female) to recognising a second object (male or non-mother). It is on this basis that a whole series of necessary integrations must occur for a satisfactory outcome in a person’s sexual and love relations – integrations between internal and external objects and between one internal object and another.

This is essentially Klein’s theory of the evolution of internal object relations from infantile to adult sexuality that she derived from her work with small children. As a developmental theory it establishes the mother as the object of primary identification in the sexual life of the infant and emphasises her contribution to the fate of psychosexual maturity or immaturity. In making full use of Abraham’s (1925a) distinction between part- and whole-objects the theory widened the conception of all areas of sexuality, but genital sexuality in particular – by showing in detail how genital primacy is likely to bear the stamp of pregenital impulses and imagos *in all their multiplicity*. However, it is the concept of the depressive position that introduces a new lexicon into the relationship between sexuality and love that is theorised to run throughout the life cycle. This concept, when applied to the pre-genital mother’s role in setting off the association between sexuality and love, opens up a vast landscape for considering the full diversity and complexity of adult sexual and love relations, in its mature and immature forms.

The implications of this theory for adult sexuality were never fully adumbrated by Klein save for a handful of references in the adult cases that appear in her writings. These references certainly make it clear she never regarded the pregenital as pre-sexual. While her early writings were overflowing with sexuality – she saw sexuality in the child's addition and multiplication – she never wrote a paper on sexuality from which Green infers she lost interest in the subject (1996, p. 879). But who can write a paper on everything? Fortunately for Klein some of her followers went on to spell out more energetically some of these implications for adult sexual object relations.

Sexual states of mind

Meltzer¹ begins with a basic sexual situation or 'set' which is Freud's idea of the primal scene (in phantasy) supplemented by Melanie Klein's insights into the infant/child's relationship with the insides of the mother's body. Accordingly, certain sexual states of mind, as opposed to behaviour, can be classified *according to the nature of the infant/child's participation, in phantasy, in the primal scene* (Meltzer 1973 p. 86). These infantile sexual states of mind are, in the main, experimental, autoerotic and polymorphous (p. 88). Central, however, to the evolution of infantile sexuality is Klein's assumption that the mother's body stirs in the baby powerful yearnings to explore and to claim its contents. This leads to a number of anxieties that are overcome through the operation of splitting-and-idealisation of both object and self (p. 90). Through these mechanisms an idealised part of the infant aligns itself to an idealised object as a safeguard against persecutory anxiety and confusion. Notwithstanding its defensive aspect, this form of over-evaluation of the object marks the beginning of the capacity to love.

Without this binary process, claims Meltzer, there is no primal differentiation between 'good' and 'bad' and the infant will surely survive only by living inside an object in a state of parasitism (p. 90). Where splitting-and-idealisation is poorly established, in other words where there is inadequate splitting-and-idealisation, especially following weaning and during latency, the need for omnipotent control over the object is overwhelming, which is achieved through an intrusive form of projective identification (Meltzer 1992, p. 33). As a result aspects of infantile hedonism do not undergo integration in the psyche but instead survive either in forms of sexual immaturity or else they ingratiate themselves into adolescent and adult sexuality in such a way as to cause states of confusion and perversity (Meltzer 1973, Ch. 13 & 18). Another method by which perverse states of mind survive is through a splitting of sensuality from affect and from phantasy. For instance, the pleasurable intake of nourishment (milk) can be split from an emotional response to the feeding experience, causing libido to become non-object seeking. At an even more primitive level, according to Meltzer, this can be achieved by dismantling the object into a collection of its sensory features – a manoeuvre

¹ Donald Meltzer was analysed by Melanie Klein between 1954 - 1960 but this was interrupted by her death. He became an active member of the British Society of Psychoanalysis and was an integral member of the Klein group at the time of writing 'Sexual States of Mind'. However, owing to tensions with the Society he withdrew in the early 80s. He went on to chart the 'Kleinian development' from Freud to Abraham to Klein to Bion – a theme reflected throughout his writings and in his continued teaching and supervising at the Tavistock Clinic, in Europe and South America. He died in August 2004.

that similarly debases the object by limiting it to a need-gratifying function (p. 109). This is a Kleinian explanation of how libido becomes non-object seeking.

Adult sexuality, asserts Meltzer, derives from an introjective identification with the internal parental couple 'of choice' (1973 p. 115 & 121).

The foundation, in the unconscious, of the sexual life of the mature person is the highly complicated sexual relation of the internal parents, with whom he is capable of a rich introjective identification in both masculine and feminine roles. (1973, p. 67).

Such an identification with both male and female qualities therefore reflects the mental bisexual disposition of everyone and a well-integrated bisexuality, according to Meltzer, allows for a more intense connection with a sexual partner. However the *nature* of the coital relation of internal objects that is identified with is the crucial factor (p. 66). As described by Klein this is structured by two factors: the relationship between the infant and the mother and whether a stable structure has been established around dependent infantile parts of the self and the internal mother, and how this is shaped by unconscious phantasies that organise these parts in relation to the inside of the mother's body (p. 68).

Meltzer (p. 68) directs us to three geographic spaces inside the mother's body – top (breast, head), front/bottom (genital), back/bottom (rectum). These spaces are also occupied, in phantasy, by the father's penis and future babies. He refers to Abraham's (1924) expansion of the erogenous stages into six categories – oral sucking/biting, anal expulsive/retentive, phallic genital/late genital – and suggests that in creating a greater geography of fixation points this expansion has added a remarkable diversity to the 'geography of phantasy' in relation to the coital possibilities between internal objects (pp. 23 – 26). But the goal is still to differentiate sexual states of mind in the adult according to whether they are polymorphous, perverse or immature.

For example, in the coital relation of internal objects the father's penis can, in phantasy, interact with all three orifices of the mother – introitus, anus, mouth. The penis can serve the function of replenishing, clearing out of debris, providing orgasmic pleasure or fertilising-by-intent – in all three orifices. But this must be distinguished from a penis that during intercourse uses the object's inner space, in phantasy, to expel faeces, to interfere with potency or to expunge future babies out of possessive jealousy – in other words for sadistic-anal assault (1973, p. 72). If defilement through the penis has occurred causing alterations to the object's inner mood the penis can then become grandiose in its attempts at reparation. This magical or manic reparation must be distinguished from the reparation the penis undertakes during lovemaking to restore the object to its previous vitality. Similarly, in the coital relation of internal objects the testicles and ejaculation of semen must be distinguished from semen preoccupations that are a denigration of the breast and breast milk. Thus 'the place of the testicles in adult sexuality can be better comprehended, distinguished from the more phallic preoccupations at infantile levels.' (p. 72).

If we move to the vagina and consider the vagina's link to the mouth – as the primordial cavity of sensual and pleasurable experience – then distinctions must be made in phantasy between the vagina as the receptive and pleasure receiving/giving cavity and the vagina as a greedy 'mouth' that strips of its goodness and vitality all that the penis bestows – an Oedipal triumph that has implications for female orgasm and sexual function (Meltzer 1992, pp. 88 – 90).

Adult sex life derives its complexity and diversity from an introjective identification, in phantasy, with these geographic coital permutations of internal parents. At one extreme lies an identification with a pre-genital 'combined object' of mutual injury or exploitation, while at the other extreme lies an identification with a parental intercourse where both partners derive sexual pleasure from one another while preserving their respective individualities and integrity. In the middle somewhere, as Freud described, lies a passionate sexual connection where a clear distinction between 'good' and 'bad' sexuality is often impossible to draw – testimony to the mysterious power of desire.

It is important to note that even though the 'coital relation of internal objects' takes as its model the parental couple i.e. a heterosexual situation, the purpose of Meltzer's structural revision of psychosexual theory from an Object Relations perspective is not to differentiate 'good' and 'bad' sexuality on the basis of quantitative and normative descriptions of sexual choices (1973, p. 66). Nor is it paramount which anatomical organ is interacting with which other organ, or which erotogenic zone, or their number, is manifesting eroticism. For Meltzer the demand of the drive for a particular object choice or behaviour is less compelling. Instead, he places the emphasis on the *state of mind* of the individuals involved in a sexual relationship and whether a 'perversity of purpose' or 'aim' is present (p. 92). This 'purpose' need not be definitively aggressive since sexual expression can be driven by aggression without being perverse, as in the case of invigorating penetrative or incorporative sex. What decides a perverse state of mind is judged in terms of three factors, the balance between infantile (part-object) and adult sexuality (whole object), the balance between libidinal and destructive impulses, and the balance between 'good' and 'bad' parts of the self.³ (p. 67). The first is central to a distinction between mature and immature (or pseudo-mature) sexuality while the latter two are central to the distinction between polymorphous and perverse sexuality – in children as well as adults.

Within these three dimensions, to repeat, the most important cause of disturbances in the development of libido is ineffective splitting-and-idealisation and the excessive use of projective identification as a precondition to establishing an object relation. In general terms this produces the inimical situation where part-objects may be treated as if they were whole objects. Meltzer is drawing out, as part of his revision of psychoanalytic

³ In Meltzer's notational system (1973 ix) for describing clinical phenomena 'good' and 'bad' parts of the self refer descriptively to parts of the infantile self that become differentiated in unconscious phantasy as the result of splitting. This varies according to individual psychology or nosological category as in: 'In perverse states of mind 'dependence upon good parts of the self is replaced by passivity towards bad parts of the self, in a mood of despair.' (1973, p.132)

sexual theory, some of the implications of the shift from drive to object relationship implicit in an Object Relations' theory.

In summarising Meltzer's formulations, which I am offering as a rebuttal to Green's claims of desexualisation, I would like to emphasise the following

- (i) how the language of part-objects and internal objects, as well as defensive concepts such as splitting of the self and object, splitting and projective identification, inadequate splitting and so on, are being used without sacrificing the idea of the ubiquity of sexuality. Instead, they enhance descriptions of the full complexity of how a person organises his or her sexual experience and are therefore of considerable clinical gain in keeping sexuality in, and not out of, the consulting room
- (ii) that these mechanisms that are involved in archaic sexuality, while analogous to repression, are of a different developmental order – but this does not mean the clinician has to choose between them. The clinician deals with what is presented, at whatever developmental level, whether this is an expression of the infinite variety of sexual expressions generated by repression or whether it is an example of the equally innumerable and 'artful' variations of sexuality revealed in pregenital psychosexual organisations
- (iii) regarding the fate of infantile sexuality beyond merely prefiguring, or being assimilated into, adult sexuality the concept of 'sexual states of mind' permits Meltzer to let the purity of infantile sexuality survive into the adult unconscious as polymorphisms and, of course, in dreams and acts of creativity. These vitalising aspects of infantile sexuality are structurally different from perverse states of mind that are habitual, addictive or criminal (Meltzer, 1973 p. 134). This 'solution' to the clinical problem posed by the analysis of the infant (as opposed to the child) in the adult predates Widlocher's (2002) attempts to address the same problem by suggesting independent lines of development for object love and infantile sexuality.

The charge of desexualisation

With the theory of 'sexual states of mind' now adumbrated it may now be possible to revisit in a little more detail some of the charges of desexualisation. Green (1996, p. 880) suggests that in Kleinian theory the 'whole sexual experience aims at finding a fully satisfying breast'. He also asserts that the theory reduces the penis to a nipple and the vagina to a mouth with the result that 'One could almost say that, for the Kleinians, the complete model of genital satisfaction is nothing other than fellatio!' (2000, p. 18). Under the present theory such an example – a penis reduced to a nipple and a vagina to a mouth – describes an example of adult polymorphism based on a zonal confusion between nipple and penis. The confusion reflects inadequate splitting and would qualify (i) as polymorphous and immature if it were motivated by sexual playfulness but (ii) it would represent a perverse state of mind if the penis was being used exclusively for oral

gratification. According to Meltzer (1974) a nipple-penis confusion results in the erotization of the breast, while a splitting of the nipple-penis from the breast generates an eroticised penis and an envious breast-with-a-hole (1988, p. 62). Both eroticisations confirm a narcissistic basis for a lack of differentiation between adult and infantile mental functioning. Klein (1957) too warned against the *overextension* of the breast model into the genital phase – premature genitalisation – that could undermine genital pleasure and function.

Meltzer defines a perverse impulse as one that attempts to ‘alter good into bad while preserving the appearance of the good’ (1973, p. 132) while a perverse state of mind, he suggests, consists of ‘the caricaturing of love relations by sado-masochism.’ (1988, p. 150). So, perhaps what Green regards as a major defect in theory is in fact an example of pathology that the theory is intended to elucidate. When he asserts that the whole sexual experience in Kleinian theory is aimed at finding a fully satisfying breast, it must be a caricature of intercourse he is describing – something along the same lines of his caricaturing Kleinian theory generally.² The use of part-object language by Kleinians’ is a means of describing analytic phenomena that are the products of (infantile) unconscious phantasies – and they are not meant literally. Ironically, such language was previously criticised on the grounds that it over-eroticised the child’s object relations. Now it is censured because it under-eroticises adult sexual experience. On the complex interconnection between infantile and adult sexuality Meltzer concludes:

The invigorating effect of adult coitus can be sharply differentiated from the inevitable deterioration of the mental state ensuing from the acting out of infantile masturbatory phantasies during sex relations (1973, p. 72).

Aesthetic reciprocity – a theory of primal seduction

Thus far, using Meltzer’s structural revision of psychoanalytic sexual theory from an Object Relations perspective, I have suggested that the critique that Kleinian theory desexualises analytic theory is overstated. In particular, some criticisms, when more closely examined, turn out to be examples of pathology that can be included in the explanatory scope of the theory. It may now be opportune to introduce Meltzer’s sub-theory of ‘aesthetic reciprocity’ and ‘aesthetic conflict’ in order to shed some additional light on the question of the emergence of object love, and its transformation into desire, within an Object Relations framework. After all, the shift from the drive to the object inherent in Object Relation’s theory allows for a more careful study of the ‘total’ relationship between sexuality and love (Parsons 2000).

² Green adopts a curiously liquorice all-sorts attitude towards the Kleinians – picking and choosing among them according to his taste. Even within one author this can be the case. For example, he states that ‘Bion is the only Kleinian for whom the model of the dream is more important than the model of the baby.’ (1992, p 587) – ignoring that the prototype of the baby at the breast is central to Bion’s theory of thinking and dreaming, especially to his subsidiary concepts of alpha function and beta elements.

Adults, but especially parents experience their baby, suggests Meltzer & Harris Williams (1988), as an aesthetic object – as something universally appealing that surpasses the baby’s formal qualities of perfect proportion, delicate texture, colouring and family resemblance (p. 56). These formal qualities are nonetheless powerful triggers that impinge upon the parent’s imagination but, according to Meltzer, it is the inner qualities of the ‘ordinary beautiful baby’ that determines its full aesthetic impact upon the parents (p. 57). These include the baby’s embryonic state, that is, ‘the essence of its baby-ishness’ which comprises the promise of a future ripe with possibilities. Similarly, the baby experiences the mother as a powerfully evocative object beyond her modality of bodily completeness and beyond such qualities as the sound of her voice, her eyes, her smell and the colour of her hair (p. 22). This outward radiance and beauty certainly arouses in the infant a response that is passionate on a sensorial level. Yet it is the interior of the mother, suggests Meltzer, her inner radiance, ‘that delivers the blow of awe and wonder’ to the baby (p. 57) because of her ‘ambiguous message’, that is to say, her resourcefulness yet changeability as evidenced in the way ‘the music of her voice keeps shifting from major to minor key.’ (p. 22). This reciprocal awareness and kindling of inner qualities is what Meltzer designates as the thrilling ‘love-at-first-sight’ quality of the mother and baby relationship – its ‘aesthetic reciprocity’ (p. 57).

Such a concept depicts the primal seduction of the infant through unconscious parental phantasy as a reciprocal process, while adding to it an aesthetic dimension of mutual ecstasy and awe. Love as sexual love emerges within this aesthetic dimension. In addition, the concept of an aesthetic dimension in early object relations speaks to the role of *qualities* in the object that determine its relation to the drives – an important addition by Object Relations theory to the psychoanalytic corpus.

Meltzer stresses that this factor – of the shrouding or veiling of the mother’s insides (as well as the inside of the nuptial chamber) – is an indispensable element in shaping the type of *introjective identification* upon which child’s discovery of his own desire will be based (1988, p. 151). While Klein had promoted the knowledge-seeking component of libido that seeks to penetrate this inside aggressively, thereby begetting anxiety, Meltzer theorises another type of epistemophilic engagement with the mother’s interior that is quieter, receptive but marked by uncertainty. It is this quality of a quiet, expectant apprehension of the object as astonishing but obscure that establishes a precondition for infantile desire. Hence the theory identifies another factor of great importance, separate from role of the ‘absent object’, in the heightening or lowering of libido, namely, the obstacle of the mother’s hidden interior.

The ‘aesthetic conflict’, asserts Meltzer & Harris Williams (1988, p. 22), derives from this painful congruence of the outward, beautiful mother of sense impressions and the enigmatic inside of the mother where her thoughts, emotions, intentions reside – a tension between surface and depth that must be deciphered through imaginative understanding. It is also derived from the ambiguous quality of the mother, who gives and takes away, creating what is essentially an aspect of the human condition – that within every joyful experience lies a reminder of a painful one. The beauty and vitality of the good object has a double meaning because it contains in its nature the latent potential

for its destruction. This idea of a constant oscillation between states of ‘pain-and-fear’ and states of ‘love-and-pain’, based on Bion’s formula of $Ps \leftrightarrow D$, leads Meltzer to propose a radical detour in received Kleinian theory (1988, p. 29). The ‘aesthetic conflict’, he claims, is essentially depressive in nature and it precedes the paranoid position. Flight from the good object is therefore primary to flight from the bad object.

The infant or small child can minimise this conflict in one of two ways – by splitting-off the mother’s interior, her enigmatic thoughts, gestures, emotions and above all her desire and instead fixating on her formal sensory qualities. This short-circuits a emotional response to the ‘total’ mother, resulting in a number of developmental deficits. These may range in severity according to the degree to which archaic defences are organised as a retreat. As an extreme response, the mother’s insides can be defensively neutralised by dismantling her into a gestalt of sensory components and then selectively attending to one or two sensual strata while ignoring the rest. This solution is exemplified in autistic states (Meltzer et al, 1975). In all cases, however, a certain *degradation* of emotionality occurs in object relations from affect to sensation, the effects of which are inimical to desire – blunting the emotional stream; preventing a ‘coming to life’ from the inside when experiencing pleasure; eroticisation of sense impressions; and a stifling the complementary element in love relations (1973, p. 108). Resolving, as opposed to minimising, the conflict involves an integration of the outer body eroticism and the hidden interior of the object.

The theory of ‘aesthetic reciprocity’, as I am proposing it here, is a theory of primal seduction from an Object Relation’s perspective that describes an epistemophilic context for the emergence of object love. The theory of ‘aesthetic conflict’ describes certain internal conditions necessary for the transformation of object love into desire. The over-arching theory of ‘sexual states of mind’, as opposed to behaviour, revises psychoanalytic thinking about the criteria for classifying the developmental course of desire according to ‘good’ and ‘bad’ sexuality. A central theme is one of internal spaces inside the object that are hidden, private and perhaps forbidden, thereby stimulating a variety of mental modes of entry into those spaces, the aims and motivations of which can be used to draw distinctions between immature, polymorphous or perverse sexuality.

Conclusion

In summary, I have presented Green’s viewpoint that British Object Relations theories are such a ‘change of paradigm’ with respect to drive theory that an integration may not be possible. I have set out the metapsychological grounds for his arguments, in particular as they support his claims of antisexual tendencies in psychoanalysis today, as exemplified by Kleinian and post-Kleinian analysis. I have also mentioned that Green attributes the absence of sexuality in analysis to a shift towards treating regressed pathologies like borderline or narcissistic personality disorders, as opposed to neurosis, where the aetiopathogenic role of sexuality in these non-neurotic disorders is ‘less obvious’ and ‘more diverse and more complicated’. (1997, p. 347).

In response I have submitted that a less obvious role does not mean no role. In fact, in this paper I have tried to convince the reader of the opposite – that if there has been a turning away from sexuality in psychoanalysis it is not *because* of Object Relations’ theory, or its metapsychological premises, but because the phenomena of sexuality are more complex today owing to the theoretical innovations made by British Object Relations theories to this area of human experience. With this purpose in mind I have presented a different account of how sexuality is retained in psychoanalytic work within the post-Kleinian Object Relations framework of Meltzer. In this theory, through the concept of sexual ‘states of mind’, the diverse and complicated features of sexuality are not given a tenuous understanding but a very detailed one. I have sought to show how terms like binary splitting and projective identification, as applied to part-object dynamics as well as whole object relations, are utilised without sacrificing the idea of the ubiquity of sexuality, nor neglecting the contrast between neurosis and perversion. In addition, through the concept of ‘aesthetic reciprocity’ and ‘aesthetic conflict’ the theory provides a conceptual framework for talking about the seduction into ‘innocent’ sexuality as reflected in the mysterious conjunction of desire between mother and baby, as well as being able to identify with great clarity the restrictive aspect of adult pathological sexuality.

Finally, I wish to emphasise that this theory, like Klein’s own theory, does not substitute Freud’s pleasure/unpleasure principle for the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ object, as Green claims (1996, p. 877). Instead, pleasure/unpleasure as a principle of psychic activity is structured around specific *affects* that comprise the qualitative aspects of psychic reality, and these can be described according to shifts between states of ‘pain-and-fear’ to states of ‘love-and-pain’ (Meltzer 1973, Ch. 1).

When Green speaks of the pre-eminent role given to the mother in Object Relations theories he believes that as a consequence ‘the father’s importance in Freud’s work is here placed in a secondary rank’ (1996, p. 877). Yet surely he knows that this statement belies the historical necessity for a correction in psychoanalytic theory of the phallogocentric bias highlighted in Freud’s work as highlighted by several generations of women analysts concerning their own sexuality. However, as Britton (2003) – a post-Kleinian analyst – suggests, this may have led to the pendulum swinging the other way, that is, making the mother all-important. But these are distortions in analytic theory, says Britton, and they can be found in the patient population too, where some patients deny the father’s importance while others deny the mother’s significance, believing the mother-infant relationship to be inferior to the father-relationship, or to the primal scene itself. In the course of analysis these ‘positions’ may alternate or be relinquished, but not without bitterness and envy. Britton concludes:

For psychic balance we need two internal parents: whatever the case for single parenthood in the outside world, I believe there is no case for it in the internal world. (2003, p. 70).

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