

Anna Freud and Melanie Klein: considerations on an inter-analytical controversy

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The lessons taught by the debate held between Anna Freud and Melanie Klein, ¿are they essentially concerned to psychoanalysis of children? Or should they, actually, be extended to the extent that there the entire Freudian theoretical and clinical corpus is involved? This would not be surprising to us because, in the case of psychoanalysis of children or adults, is actually the same object the one that is explored: namely, the child object.

Why such strong oppositions, such a radical controversy, did not lead to a split but to a coexistence of both schools of thought in British society? Can there be detected reasons that go beyond current or personal circumstances? From what time, in fact, the theoretical differences lead to a breakdown of the minimum consensus needed to sustain an analytical community?

The fact that Anna Freud and Melanie Klein have not reached that point of no return can clarify this question. For us, the debate between them emphasizes again the irreducible gap between theory and practice, separation that stems from a relation to the unknown and to the unknowable with which all theorists must deal, sometimes painfully. Both Anna Freud and Melanie Klein, for personal reasons and also linked to the logic of their theoretical proposals, will be confronted with this essential epistemological problem that Freud permanently included in his view. Are not their relation to the unknown and the unknowable susceptible to clarify some key aspects of their conflict? From a historical point of view, I will try to outline, within the framework of this article, some answers to these various questions.¹

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¹ Main bibliographic sources used: Grosskurth P. (1990), *Mélanie Klein, son monde et son oeuvre*, Paris, PUF. Young-Bruchl E.(1988), *Anna Freud*, Paris: Payot. Geissmann C. and Geissmann P. (1992), *Histoire de la psychanalyse de l'enfant*, Paris, Bayard.

History of the conflict

Melanie Klein was born thirty years before Anna Freud and, therefore, she began to practice analytic therapy before the daughter of the founder of psychoanalysis.

In the historical aspect, we will distinguish three main phases:

A first period -which may be between 1919 and 1926- during which Melanie Klein will be the first to communicate to the psychoanalytic movement her researches relating to psychoanalysis of children.

A second period, extending from 1927 (date of the Innsbruck Congress) until 1939 (date of the death of Freud and the beginning of the war), where an increasingly radical opposition begins to develop between Anna Freud and Melanie Klein, in front of which Sigmund Freud discreetly supported the views of his daughter. The debate exceeds both personalities and it rather will crystallize the existence of two poles in the psychoanalytic movement: the British psychoanalysis, from which Ernest Jones is then the most eminent representative, and the Viennese group, solid bulwark of Freudian orthodoxy. While the differences relate to child psychoanalysis at first, fundamental theoretical issues, very quickly, will be involved, especially different conceptions of genetic development that refer to the commissioning about early launch of the Oedipus complex and the formation of superego, which will result in a very different appreciation of the relationship of children to parents, with direct consequences on the practice of the cure.

These divergences also concern the more or less belated existence of a psychic object for the infant and, therefore, they lead to a questioning of Freud's works on narcissism. The role of the ego and of its defense mechanisms, are considered substantially different by Melanie Klein and by Anna Freud, and they will be accompanied by opposed conceptions of the therapeutic alliance, which will concern both the cure with adults as with children. Finally, the notion of *après-coup* is used by Melanie Klein in a period that lies before the latency stage, while Anna Freud, strongly supported at this point by her father, continues to insist on the fundamental role of pubertal *après-coup*. Here the consequences are even greater regarding the psychoanalytic conception of the process of adolescence, and of the radical differences that separate the cure of a child from the one of an adult (i.e., a subject having or not the possibility of acceding to true

and complete sexual relationships) We will return later, in more detail, to the various issues raised during this second period.

Finally, in a third stage that goes from the death of Freud (1939) to that of Melanie Klein (1960), the great controversies reach their peak, with their salient point between 1941 and 1945. The discussion involves the most eminent students of Melanie Klein, especially Susan Isaacs with his classic article "*The nature and function of fantasy*," which will result in more than eighteen pages of suggestions and additions of Melanie Klein herself. A split will be narrowly avoided and a middle group will be detached from within British society, in which the figures of Donald W. Winnicott and Michael Balint appear. An agreement to organize two training courses in parallel within British society will be barely set: one of Kleinian obedience and another sustained by the theories of Anna Freud. From this point one cannot really talk about debate, but about a sort of armed peace. Melanie Klein and Anna Freud expect, each to his own, to develop their own theoretical and clinical paradigms.

Between 1950 and 1960, Melanie Klein deepens the theorizing of the depressive position, to which opposes, in the context of an evolving system, the schizo-paranoid position. Towards the end of her life, she introduces the concept of *primary envy*. It is then that a homogeneous core of disciples is constituted around her, while one of his best reputed students, Paula Heimann, whose analysis with Melanie Klein extends more than twenty years, was put aside due to their original conceptions about countertransference, exposed in 1950.

Meanwhile, Anna Freud continues her elaborations in the furrow opened by her book *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* (1936). She creates the conditions for direct observation of the normal child, which should provide comparative data to evaluate the indication, the progress and the results of an analytical therapy: the Jackson Nursery in Vienna will be the first, later, the War Nursery in London and finally, after the war, the Hampstead Clinic. With her main coworkers, especially Sandler, she develops an index that allows the clinician to locate, according to developmental lines, the pathological deviations that will determine an analytical or therapeutic intervention.

The whole of her latest works was published long after the death of Melanie Klein, as for example *Normality and Pathology in Childhood* (1965), *The analysis of the Defense* (1985) and *Techniques of child psychoanalysis* (1980).

Main theoretical considerations

In the initial phase, which goes from 1919 to 1927, Melanie Klein develops her first theoretical and clinical elaborations.

After a first analysis with Sándor Ferenczi in Budapest, Melanie Klein is settled in Berlin in 1921. In 1924, she starts a second analysis with Karl Abraham, which will be prematurely interrupted by the latter's death in 1925. Her first elaborations are heavily influenced by Abraham's researches referred to the pregenital phases of the libido, as well as the manifestation of various mechanisms related to mourning and manic-depressive psychosis. Instead, it seems to take away from Ferenczi's concerns relating to family environment as a traumatic factor. After, this approach will create difficulties in the relationships with her first analyst.

Melanie Klein is inspired by the game technique that was proposed some years before by Hermine von Hug-Hellmuth, but she encodes it more precisely: small objects, always the same, play dough, paper and pencils, all within a personal box for each child. The number of sessions is at least five a week, at the therapist's place. From the beginning, the development of the child's game is considered as equivalent to free associations of psychoanalysis of adults, an equalization that will be one of the essential points of her divergences not only with Anna Freud but also with other analysts. It should be noted that, as Anna Freud, Melanie Klein began his analytic practice with children.

In 1919, she submits her first article to the Hungarian society, which will be read in two parts: "*The development of a child*" in 1919 and "*The analysis of young children*" in 1921. Later, we will know that the analyzed case, Fritz, is indeed her own son, Erich. In these texts, she already shows in advance her essential thesis: it is appropriate to interpret the negative transference from the beginning of the cure and foremost, to the extent that the destructive anxieties linked to the child's oral and anal sadism are focused there. The conception of an Oedipus complex, which goes back to long before the classical period postulated by Freud, -between three and five years old- begins to be present. Moreover, the existence of a partial object, total later, is part, for Melanie Klein, of the first few months of existence of psychic life of the infant. She proposes the analyst staying with the child on a strict attitude, interpretative and analytical, as much as he can do it with the adult. During this period, except for some reluctance, as those of Sándor Radó, her thesis will undoubtedly get the approval of much of the psychoanalytic

movement, especially Berliner and British ones. However, from 1926, Anna Freud will intervene in the debate, opposing her criticism to Melanie Klein's points of view.

Anna Freud began an analysis with her father in two periods, the first of which began in the fall of 1918. In the beginning she is a teacher, but, as Melanie Klein, she has no formal college education. Her first contribution, "*On the Flagellation Fantasies and Illusions Day Care*" was actually written six months before receiving her first patient (Young-Bruehl, 1988, p. 93). Despite the criticism made by some colleagues of her father, this conference will let her become a member of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society on May 3, 1922. The material of the case presented is presumably self-analytical. And several references also let us think that one of the clinical examples of Freud's famous article "*A child is being beaten*" (1919) refers to his own daughter (Freud, 1979a).00

With children, Anna Freud's technique differs substantially from that of Melanie Klein, from which emerges a fundamental observation. It seems like if a rather inductive reasoning would have been adopted by Melanie Klein. She first is confronted with the negative transference of the child and she tried to give a theoretical translation, in terms of pregenital destructive anxieties. Instead, Anna Freud's reasoning would rather be deductive. If there is a negative transference it is due to the normal development of the child who, until a certain age, remains too tied to his parents as to easily be able to transfer his positive feelings to a stranger, even to the therapist.

Starting from the theory of development proposed by her father -and especially from these essential points that are the existence of a objectless stage, of an Oedipal complex between three and five years old, after which the true superego is formed, and finally, of the fundamental role played by the pubertal après-coup-, she draws the consequence that the child, being a developing human being until after adolescence, could not be treated analytically as an adult. He would remain essentially influenced by the environment, which would prevent the establishment of a transference neurosis with him. Then, he must continue undergoing an educational influence and it would be convenient to be careful about the fact that the analytic treatment does not contravene this necessary evolution. Then, one must foresee a preparatory phase, intended to soften the child, to fight his fears justified in front of a stranger, before a positive transference could actually be established. For her, the children's game is not equivalent to the free associations of the adult, because the game will certainly form part of the normal universe of the child, but the free association is, instead, an artificial creation of the psychoanalytic process.

Anna Freud will first expose her divergences in her introduction to the technique of child analysis (Vienna, 1926) and later in the Colloquium of Innsbruck (1927), which will lead to the first skirmishes between the British group headed by Ernest Jones and the Viennese group. Meanwhile, also in 1926, Melanie Klein, at the invitation of Ernest Jones, settled in England, a country where he remained until his death in 1960. Melanie Klein and Anna Freud intended, therefore, from this period (1926-1927), to continue working in parallel their contradictory elaborations. Then we enter the second phase, which runs from 1927 to 1939, the year of Freud's death and the start of World War II.

Here are some significant events:

In 1930, Melanie Klein published *'The Importance of Symbol Formation in the Development of the Ego'*. It is the analysis of little Dick, a child with a symptomatology rather autistic than psychotic in the classic sense, with a significant reserve. She insists respect of the bonds that are between the knowing drive and the child sadism of exploration of the maternal body. Dick's withdrawal would be a defense produced by the inhibition of these destructive impulses. This important thesis will have a direct consequence on the most recent elaborations in regard to psychogenetic autism (Donald Meltzer and Frances Tustin).

In 1935, after the death of her son Hans², Melanie Klein published her *"Contribution to the study of psychogenesis of manic-depressive states,"* which was read in an abridged way during the 1934 Lucerne Congress (Grosskurth, 1990). In this text, she postulates the existence of a passage, between the four and five months old, from the perception of the partial object to the total object. For the first time, she introduces the notion of depressive position to designate this moment marked by an intense activity of the object's repair, previously damaged by child sadism. The depressive position is clearly linked to the resolution of the Oedipus complex, from which is perceived how early it is placed.

Thus, two fundamental hypotheses that will feed all subsequent divergences are deepened and emphasized.

1. Discovery of a phantasmatic early interaction with the object, being the narcissistic withdrawal a consequence of the failure of this original ambivalent relation. Therefore, the primary narcissism postulated by Freud has no place in this theorization, because the infant would be a prey, during the first months of a much elaborated intense phantasmatic activity.

² ¿Accidental death or suicide? Melitta Schmiedeberg, Melanie Klein's daughter, argued that it was a suicide.

2. The Oedipus complex and the superego would be formed much earlier than indicated by the classical theory. The resolution of the Oedipus complex is the result of an elaboration of the persecutory anxieties that lead, in normal cases, to a depressive passage that allows the restoration of the object that had been damaged by aggressive and destructive drives. In this way, Melanie Klein fully includes into her theory the hypothesis of the death drive.

For her part, Anna Freud works on resolving the defensive functions of the ego, thus showing that it continues to develop beyond the phases described by Melanie Klein. Her subsequent elaborations referring to "analysis of defense" are directly related to the concerns expressed by his father in "*Analysis terminable and interminable*", 1937. The last part of this text was highlighted, especially in France, in that part Freud insists on the rock of the unanalyzable feminine, psychoanalysis as an occupation impossible, theme that do show that the relation between the unknown and the unknowable is a fundamental concern for Freud. But maybe the first pages of this text in which Freud highlights, within the analytical treatment goals, the strengthening of the self that is sought against the pathogenic action of the drives, are underestimated. Thus, Freud can write this: "The traumatic etiology provides the analysis, by far, the most favorable opportunity. (...) Thanks to the strengthening of the self [replaces] the deficient decision that comes from an early age by a proper processing. Only in such a case one can speak of a definitely finished analysis" (1976, p. 223). While, conversely, "the harmful alteration of the self, acquired during the defensive struggle in the sense of an unhinged and of a limitation, is an unfavorable factor for the effect of the analysis and it's able to prolong its duration until what cannot be conclude". There is here an explicit reference to the work of his daughter, "*The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*" (1936), but above all a consistent investigation of father and daughter when Freud underlines: "The defense mechanisms serve the purpose of removing hazards. It is unquestionable that they succeed; it is doubtful that the Ego, during its development, can completely renounce them, but it's also sure that they can become hazardous. (...) These mechanisms are not relinquished after having helped the Ego during the difficult years of its development (...) they share the fate of so many institutions that strive to preserve themselves when the time of its suitability has passed "(1976, pp. 239-240). Freud insists on the fact that in every analytic treatment there is, in a successive way, the analysis of a fragment of the id and then a fragment of the ego. His daughter Anna will pursue the further study of these defense mechanisms of the unconscious Ego that hinder access to of the analyst to the id.

From this we can infer the two ways that Anna Freud will explore for the rest of his life.

1. The analysis of the defenses. It's useless to analyze the id if the Ego is not ready. A direct attack to the Kleinian point of view that disdains these defenses, whose organization is relatively late.

2. The analytical treatment of the child conceals an eminently preventive element, designed to respect the organization of the necessary defenses against anxiety only to the extent that they tend not to be organized in rigid structures that have a lot of weight in adulthood as to become finally, disabling.

Then, there is here, in 1936-1937, a consistent analytical reflection by Freud and his daughter that will have a great influence on the future of psychoanalytic therapy. The emphasis is on the analysis of the strengths and the role of the Ego.

But, let us look more closely at the positions expressed by Freud before this period, in the debate that Anna held with Melanie.

Speaking of the 1926 conference ("The psychoanalytic treatment of children"), Freud writes to Eitingon: "The most enjoyable event right now is Anna's course of child analytic technique. I suppose that she communicates with you about it. But it is really the general opinion that she knows how to hold the attention of her audience. She tells me the content of each lesson on the evening before and I am especially gratified that she does not, like a student, simply apply what she has learned elsewhere, she deals with the subject, she judges by herself, and knows how to assert the particularities of this kind of analysis. Compared to the opinions of Klein, hers are conservative, one might even say reactionary, but it looks as if she is right "(Young-Bruehl, 1988, p. 149).

In a correspondence with Jones, previous to the Congress of Innsbruck, where the differences were really going to explode, he writes: " Mrs. Klein position about the behavior of the ego ideal or superego of children seems to me completely impossible and contradictory regarding all my fundamental hypothesis (...).I would like to contradict Mrs. Klein on one point: She believes that the superego of children is as independent as that of the adults, while it seems to me that Anna is right when emphasizing that the superego of the child is still under the direct influence of his parents ".

Now let us begin the study of the third phase of the conflict, which begins after the death of Freud in England. Fleeing Nazi's persecution, much of the Viennese group, along with Freud's family settled in England in 1938. For Melanie Klein it's a disaster that she will reproach Ernest Jones all her life. From 1941 to 1945, in London, under the

bombs, the great controversies begin. The debate's considerations are not merely scientific. They become institutional. Who will take control of the British society and especially by the training of students? But that does not prevent that the theoretical content of the controversies reach an unprecedented level. A parallel with the situation in France in the years 1950 to 1960 should be established, beginning by the exclusion of Jacques Lacan of the IPA. It is as if, in certain circumstances, some passion, with its institutional incidents, could lead to a deepening of the scientific reflection of psychoanalysis. The image of psychoanalysts discussing calmly, peacefully and objectively issues that painfully encourage their practice, is it not a well-worn myth? In fact, this debate -Freud was no longer there to draw a demarcation line between what is still psychoanalytic and what constitutes a deviance- is about the minimum consensus necessary for there to be mutual recognition among psychoanalysts.

Thus, Edward Glover, the analyst of Melitta Schmieberg, daughter of Melanie Klein, who deeply hated her mother, says that Klein's theory is not scientific and is anti-Freudian. According to him, it cannot be validated because of the practice of healing involved, which he regards as a maneuver of indoctrination of the patient and not as a shared discovery. Hence his idea of preparing a questionnaire whose answers could clear the axes of psychoanalytic common minimum consensus. But this endeavor will last a long time, as the more recent of Wallerstein. Finally, to mark his disagreement with the presence of Kleinians in the British society, Edward Glover will leave it and he will join the Swiss society.

While Anna Freud, for reasons that will certainly hold on his temper and institutional tactical problems, is more measured in her intentions at heart, and it's hard to doubt this, she shares Glover's views. The core of the dispute seems now to rise in relation to the previous period. It deals with the Kleinian perspective, brilliantly developed by Susan Isaacs in "*Nature and function of fantasy*", according to which the phantoms are psychic representatives of drives (Isaacs, 2000). Any separation between the unknowable originary, on the edge of the body and the psyche, and the birth of an elaborate phantasmatic life that only could be developed later, tends to disappear. To escape this paradox, the contemporary contributions of Piera Aulagnier³ seem fundamental.

For the followers of Anna Freud and Edward Glover, the renunciation of a primary narcissistic phase with the existence in return for an object relationship, populated at this very early stage of phantoms already very elaborated, it's devoid of any scientific

³ It must be seen in particular: Castoriades-Aulagnier, P. (1977) *La violencia de la interpretación*. Buenos Aires: Amorrortu

value, since it is not based on any observable data. We imagine the welcome received by the Kleinian theorists in the United States, where the rationalist spirit of the environment should be considered quasi-delusional. We can also understand, from there, the increasingly large place that Anna Freud and many American practitioners awarded to the direct observation of infants, understanding that it contributed with elements of inaccessible knowledge to the analytical reconstruction.

Since 1945, some British psychoanalysts, even if they did not share the thesis of Anna Freud, they seem increasingly refractory to the Kleinian orientation that they began to regard as dogmatic. Thus, Balint and Winnicott, although for different reasons, did not adhere to the Kleinian view of an infant animated by psychotic and destroyer phantoms. As for Bowlby -who will follow a very particular way, like Winnicott- he attaches great importance to the effective role played by the family.

The teachings of the debate

Let us now try to draw some brief and current teachings of these controversies. In reference to the "relation to the unknown", from which Guy Rosolato explored various aspects throughout his work; we think that this relation as well of the subject as of the psychoanalyst to the unknown and to the unknowable residue, is in the very basis of psychoanalytic epistemology. As the author points out, "the psychoanalytic listening for its part should also reflect on the unknown for a better dismantling of the theory (...)" (Rosolato, 1981).

This theoretical concern appears in many texts of Freud (and so scattered) that alone would merit a particular study. So that, beyond the quotes that could be done, it's all Freud's work, his spirit itself, which seems to be shaped by the mortifying questioning that comes from the unknown and from the unknowable.

But, returning to our subject, as well as to the debate between Anna Freud and Melanie Klein, we can highlight these significant excerpts from the analysis of Little Hans that, in our eyes, are a perfect illustration of the relation to the unknown: "to conclude, I add: with the ultimate fantasy of Hans, the anxiety caused by the castration complex was also overcome: the painful expectation was turning into one of bliss. Indeed, the doctor (plumber) comes, removes the penis, but only to change it for a bigger one. Otherwise, our little researcher has come to know, very early, that all knowledge is a fragment and that at each stage there always remains a remnant not solved "(Freud, 1980, p. 83).

Anna was sensitive to his father's apophaticism, but was she able to follow the logic through? It's a question we'll be trying to answer later. Lo and behold, for example, which suggests her the reading of *"Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety"* (1979b): "What is remarkable is that Dad -contrary to all others- continually highlights all that remains unexplained and uncertain in his questions, so we have the feeling of being in a field where everything is debatable, unknown, where we only have the first clues. With the others, everything is always so well-known and established, so well ordered that one should really distrust "(Young-Bruehl, 1988, p. 169).

Indeed, we think that although Freud's work is governed by a sense of rationality which, in some respects, leads him to adopt methods inspired by the scientific spirit, according to the notion of Bachelard it's not yet a closed rationalist and concluded real theory that would imply a submission to the psychoanalytic and unconscious to a dictatorship of the Reason.

We think that Anna Freud as well as Melanie Klein, although for opposite reasons, underestimated the place to be given to the unknown in all analytical theorizing.

Melanie Klein revealed a world of phantoms and of psychic mechanisms (we think of the projective identification and of the depressive position) where the knowledge is an essential tool in contemporary analytic practice, especially in the field of autism, psychosis and borderline states. But it does it not give the impression that these formulations tend to eliminate from the originary those depths forever unknowable, inaccessible to the "Ego", on which so much Piera Aulagnier insisted? In this way, is it not excessively reduced the separation that must subsist between theory and practice, with the harmful consequences of this reduction on the direction of the treatment? The theory, privileging increasingly these phases of psychic evolution beyond all recall, leads to crush the interrogation that comes from the patient himself, the original material he provides and which is capable of continuously contradict the theory.

Like the Lacanism, the Kleinianism (if by that we understand the thought of Melanie Klein organized as a system), is not a form of theorizing, i.e. a disease of theoretical thinking which tends to eliminate everything that cannot be tested in strictly conceptual terms?

When, during a session, the analyst ends up talking more than his patient, or makes him say everything in his own theoretical language, or even when in an unexpected and unreasonable way he interrupts the patient concluding the session, under the pretext that he thought to have detected in his patient's speech one of the

subjects that his theory favors, we can be sure that this theoretician, even terrorist obstacle was attained.

Now let's go back to Anna Freud, and let's do her justice, since her work on "lines of development" has a clear opening into the unknown, very valuable for the construction of a psychoanalytic nosography devoid of prejudice, "To the imbalance in the child's personality caused by the different degrees of development in the various lines progressing toward maturity, we must add the ups and downs determined by the regressions of the various elements of the structure and their combinations. On this basis, it becomes easier to understand why there are so many differences of development and average picture of a hypothetically normal child. With the interactions between the progression and the regression, both of such complex nature, the disharmonies, and the imbalances - in short, the complexities of development- become countless *the variations of normality*"(Freud, 1973, pp. 86-87). It's placed there in a research perspective that restores in right full the complexity of psychic determinations as opposed to the structuralist simplifications which we saw flourishing in France along the years 1960-70.

However, we have emphasized above procedure excessively deductive of Anna Freud. What seemed to obsess her was to prove that his father's theory was true. Now then, no one will be ever able to prove scientifically the truth of a theory of the psyche, even the most rigorous one. Psychoanalysis will never be a science of the observation, a science of nature. It is doomed to remain being a practice of interpretation that obeys to criteria of communicable rationality but not reproducible, since the elimination of the subject of observation is structurally impossible here. Undoubtedly, from this error that comes the increasingly large place given by Anna Freud and her successors to the direct observation of the child. Her great project was to get to collect the data of the direct observation and those of the analytical reconstruction; hence the impression of a huge systematization deduced from Hampstead Clinic's papers.

We conclude with a last observation: finally, the split didn't have place, since, beyond their differences, Anna Freud and Melanie Klein continued to advocate the respect, in its integrality, of the technical method carried out by Freud. This element of consensus goes far beyond the simple observation of a ritual. It translates the existence of common references that, maybe, sustained a community of analytical experiences, not only between Anna Freud and Melanie Klein, but especially among those that, currently, refer to their respective theories. What Freud gave us through his method - and that's why it is so important to respect its spirit and to some extent its letter- is

that it is a last bastion allowing the relation to the unknown play its interrogator role of the theory.

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