



Waiting for a Concept By Edna O'Shaughnessy

The second in a series of three papers presented during the seminar 'Facing the Pain of Crimes and their Reparation' at the 48th International Psychoanalytical Association congress, Prague, 2013. See also paper 1, Melanie Klein's Discovery of Reparation by Claudia Frank and paper 3, Primitive Reparation and the Repetition Compulsion in the Analysis of a Borderline Patient, by Heinz Weiss.

Freud

The tragedy of *Oedipus* by Sophocles is well known to psychoanalysts. Sophocles' world is a world of fate. Oedipus is fated to murder his father and marry his mother, crimes which bring punishments and disasters upon himself, his family and his city. No matter how Oedipus tries – and he does try e.g. he leaves Corinth where he grew up to save – as he thinks – his King and Queen, but he cannot escape his destiny. That is his tragedy. Sophocles located the world of tragic humankind in external reality in ancient Greece under a world of Gods. And centuries later, as Jonathan Lear (p18, 1998) has described, Freud put Sophocles' world inside us.

In one of his late, marvelously innovative papers, written after long years of psychoanalytic inquiry into the human psyche, Freud described in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1929), what it is to make the journey from a 'state of nature', as he calls it, to becoming a civilized human being. Civilization, he says, demands of us the renunciation and repression of many sexual and aggressive instincts. This brings us unhappiness. Moreover, our ego suffers under a cruel super-ego that lays guilt upon us for our Oedipal crimes. This super-ego is vigilant, all-seeing and all-knowing. It punishes us for actions, and also for impulses and phantasies. Freud writes 'The super-ego torments the sinful ego... and is on the watch for getting it punished by the external world'. (ibid p125). 'Life, as we find it' he concludes 'is too hard for us; it brings us too many pains, disappointments and impossible tasks'.

Freud then discusses a long list of ways in which we try to make life more tolerable. Alas, these will not in his view restore our lost happiness or alleviate our guilt. They are only 'palliative measures'. He says: 'There are perhaps three such measures: powerful deflections, which cause us to make light of our misery; substitutive satisfactions, which diminish it; and intoxicating substances, which make us insensitive to it. Something of the kind is indispensable. Voltaire has deflections in mind when he ends *Candide* with the advice to cultivate one's garden; and scientific activity is a deflection of this kind, too. The substitutive satisfactions, as offered by art, are illusions in contrast with reality but they are nonetheless psychically effective, thanks to the role which phantasy has assumed in mental life. The intoxicating substances influence our body and alter its chemistry' (ibid p75). He also

describes the inner measures that suffering humanity takes: staying aloof from others, turning away from the external world, becoming manic (this Freud thinks is like intoxication). And if reality is altogether intolerable we resort to illusions, or even a delusional remoulding of reality.

Even those sublimations of the instincts which bring solace – he cites ‘an artist’s joy in creating... or a scientist’s in solving problems or discovering truths... [and how] such satisfactions seem ‘finer and higher’ , yet even so, Freud contends ‘their intensity is mild as compared with that derived from the sating of crude and primary instinctual impulses’ (ibid p 79 seq).

Here is the kernel of Freud's thinking: happiness ultimately depends on the satisfaction of our instincts. Civilization means a loss of some of this happiness, and moreover makes us suffer under a cruel and punishing burden of guilt, that springs from the Oedipus complex and the murder of the father. Freud recognizes that our situation is conflicted. He writes ‘... if the human sense of guilt goes back to the killing of the primal father, that was after all a case of ‘remorse’... this remorse was the result of the primordial ambivalence of feeling towards the father. His sons hated him but they loved him too... Now I think we can at last grasp two things perfectly clearly: the part played by love in the origin of conscience and the fatal inevitability of the sense of guilt’ (ibid p132).

I think we must remember that *Civilization and its Discontents* is where Freud formulated his final theory of the instincts as the conflict between Eros and Thanatos. Civilization is an expression of Eros, and with all its discontents, in Freud’s view is to be preferred to a state of nature. Unexpectedly, two years before, in a short paper on *Humour* (1927), Freud had glimpsed a super-ego different from the cruel watcher, a super-ego that offers consolation by means of humour and in this way comforts the troubled ego. Near the end of *Civilization and its Discontents*, however, on a more magisterial note, he says ‘I bow to their reproach [meaning the reproach of his fellow-men] that I can offer them no consolation’ (ibid p145).

Freud’s investigations have changed Sophocles’ play: tragic humankind with a destiny given to him by the gods, has become guilty humankind – because now his crimes come from within himself.

This is where Freud took us and left us. I think psychoanalysis was waiting for some such concept as ‘reparation’ that Claudia Frank just described.

Klein

In this same period, the 1920s, while Freud was reflecting on humankind’s discontents, Klein was analysing small children. Claudia Frank has shown how these analyses confirmed Freud’s findings of an inner world of crime and guilt, fear and suffering. Klein extended these findings to pre-Oedipal times, and included also the early relationship to the mother. And we saw sometimes, when aggression is out of control, even small children can find life unbearable. Think of Erna who pictures herself as the girl ‘... who sits in her

room to avoid knowing anything about the murder', a girl who needs to deaden herself, maybe even die.

Melanie Klein observed how the psychic state of these young patients depended on and was identified with the state of their objects, and how, unhappy with anxiety, guilt and sometimes remorse, they felt urgently the wish to repair the damage they had done with their hatred to their objects and themselves. Grete, Rita and Erna led Klein to introduce into psychoanalysis notions of 'making good' and 'repair' – the forerunners of the concept of reparation. From such early findings in children and also adults, Klein slowly developed her ideas. The wish to repair was differentiated from reaction formation and sublimation, and in 1935 (*Writings Vol I*) reparation became a key concept in her theory of a Depressive Position.

Two things are of special interest. The first is the shift in psychoanalytic theory away from an instinct theory where the object has only a secondary role as the means of gratifying the instinct, to an object relations theory in which relations to objects are as fundamental as the instincts themselves. This change in theory was being made at that time by Klein among others, e.g., Fairbairn, Winnicott and Balint. The second thing of note is that Klein is beginning to offer a new theory, viz., the human psychic journey happens in two constellations: first a Paranoid Schizoid Position, then a Depressive Position. Seen in these Kleinian terms, in *Civilization and its Discontents* Freud took us to the borders of the Depressive Position – unhappiness, persecuting guilt, a punishing super-ego, remorse. Klein saw we can continue, struggle on further and try to make some reparation for our crimes.

What is reparation?

Reparation is an impulse of Eros. In Freud's words, Eros is 'the instinct to preserve living substance and to join it into ever larger units'. In the Depressive Position (which we could think of as civilization) the ego attempts to do just this with its relations to its objects and itself – to preserve life and to integrate it into larger units.

What happens to the discontents Freud described when the ego becomes more integrated – the renunciation of instinct that is demanded, the inevitability of guilt, and the unhappiness? Instinctual renunciation will remain but will be endured less from fear or force, more from identification and empathy with others, perhaps even mourned as a loss. A different super-ego will develop – a humanist conscience. Indeed, Freud glimpsed it when he described (1927) a super-ego with humour and a certain tenderness for the ego. It is interesting how Freud always saw guilt as object related – after all, along with his instinct theory he also had an object relations theory. Klein's biggest difference in understanding is in regard to the unhappiness, the anxiety and depression that comes with civilization, which she sees not only as a 'discontent' due to the restriction of instincts, but also, and more fundamentally, as coming from identifications with primary objects. When these are felt to have been murdered, damaged, humiliated, the ego in identification feels deadened, broken, mortified. The emotional dependence of

the ego on the state of its internalized objects was many times Freud's view also e.g. in *Mourning and Melancholia* (though not in *Civilization and its Discontents*).

If the pain of responsibility for damage to primary objects can be faced and to an extent worked through and some reparation made, the depression of unconsciously containing damaged internal objects will change, and a feeling of alive objects within will predominate. In identification the ego will be more alive, better able to enjoy life, mourn its losses, recover from failures, while unconscious phantasies of reparation will inform sexual life, and, in Klein's view, artistic creativity and scientific endeavours.

Freud was a realist about humankind. You will recall his pessimism at the end of *Civilization and its Discontents* where he writes 'The fateful question for the human species seems to me to be whether and to what extent their cultural development will succeed in mastering the disturbance of their cultural life by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction' (ibid p145). Melanie Klein too was a realist. Reparation is difficult. Under the burden of our guilt, we may have a yearning for absolution, redemption, forgiveness from an all-merciful being. Reparation differs from religious conceptions of God's mercy or the absolution given to sinners. It has no absolutes – it occurs in a human context, limited and conflicted. Perhaps reparation is nearer to the South African idea of Truth and Reconciliation.

Moreover, Klein thought the ego will always tend to slip back to a more persecuted state so that working through towards a Depressive Position will need repeating throughout life. She distinguished between true and manic reparation. Manic reparation is an omnipotent manic defence, often needed in the early depressive position when emotional pain and guilt are still too persecutory to be faced. Manic reparation, though reparative, is too weighted with triumph over an object seen with contempt and so will fail to relieve guilt or restore the object.

Klein also charted the struggle that it is to make true reparation – even as we try, there may come a recrudescence of hate and grievance. There is also the task of taking responsibility for the crimes, naming them, and facing external and internal reality. All this lessens anxiety and brings relief by replacing what Bion calls 'nameless dread' by specific deeds; it brings the consolation that our guilt is limited, and not as we unconsciously feared, immeasurable.

Even so, it involves recognizing the painful truth that there are no new beginnings – what's done cannot be undone, and facing also that while some destruction can be repaired and ease our guilt, guilt continues for things done that we feel to be irreparable, unforgivable. In the psychic endeavour to make reparation, the state of the internal and external objects on whom the patient depends – are they alive or injured? Do they survive in the psyche? Are *they* forgiving? becomes of vital importance.

Reparation is human psychic work, limited, uncertain, conflicted – impelled by love, obstructed by hatred. It is a crucial developmental step Freud’s guilty humankind tries to take, each along an individual path and to the extent that he can – given the inner and external worlds on which he depends.

I think this will come clinically alive, and we shall gain further understanding, when Heinz Weiss presents his work with a patient struggling to make reparation.

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