

Review

Judith M. Hughes. *Guilt and Its Vicissitudes: Psychoanalytic Reflections on Morality*. London & New York: Routledge, 2008. ISBN: 978-0-415-43598-7. Paperback, 144 pp.

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Joseph Sandler (1960) was among the first to recognize the flight from the superego that characterized psychoanalysis for almost half a century. Ironically, at the very time it was studying narcissistic characters incapable of bearing guilt psychoanalysis was itself evading it. But early in the new millennium the repressed began to return in psychoanalytic discourse in the form of books and articles with titles such as *You Ought To! A Psychoanalytic Study of the Superego and Conscience* (Barnett, 2007); *Guilt and Its Vicissitudes: Psychoanalytic Reflections on Morality* (Hughes, 2008); *The Quest for Conscience and the Birth of the Mind* (Reiner, 2009); *The Still Small Voice: Psychoanalytic Reflections on Guilt and Conscience* (Carveth, 2013); "Reflections on the absence of morality in psychoanalytic theory" (Frattaroli, 2013); and *Guilt: Origins, Manifestations, and Management* (Akhtar, Ed., 2013). (See Carveth [2012] for a review of some of these titles.)

In my view the fact that this intellectual shift took place virtually simultaneously with the 2007-2008 crisis of "casino capitalism" was no coincidence: our thinking forms part of the ideological superstructure which, however much its elements may to varying degrees correspond with inner and outer "reality," is profoundly influenced, if not "in the last analysis" determined, by the socio-economic substructure. This is as true of psychoanalytic thought as of any other. While "the culture of narcissism" (Lasch, 1979) created by consumer capitalism put the study of narcissistic pathology on our agenda, it at the same time infected us with it, giving rise to our five decade-long "forgetting" of the superego and of what I distinguish as the conscience (Carveth, 2013).

In *Reshaping the Psychoanalytic Domain: The Work of Melanie Klein, W.R.D. Fairbairn, and D.W. Winnicott* (1989) Judith Hughes surveyed the emergence of psychoanalytic

object-relations theory. In *Guilt and Its Vicissitudes* (2008) she focuses in depth upon the evolving understanding of morality in the work of Freud himself and that of Melanie Klein and various of her followers who further developed it (Hanna Segal, Joan Riviere, Wilfred Bion, Betty Joseph, John Steiner and Ronald Britton). An historian by training, Hughes writes about psychoanalytic ideas not only with scholarly depth and sophistication, but also with a clinician's understanding of the issues.

Having carefully reviewed the development of Freud's thinking in this area, Hughes then traces the development of Klein's important contributions and those of her collaborators (Riviere, Segal) who despite their innovations remain close to her own understanding, and then the more recent work of contemporary Kleinians influenced by Bion (Joseph, Steiner and Britton) who shift significantly in their thinking about morality, stressing less the role of love in the ambivalence of the depressive position in generating concern and reparative guilt and more the role in moral functioning of cognitive development and the capacity to think. Thus, in the course of her survey, Hughes manages to highlight important theoretical tensions that remain controversial today. As someone who has recently come down on the Kleinian rather than the Bionian side in this debate (Carveth, 2013), my only regret is that ultimately Hughes roots for the wrong team—the thinkers rather than the lovers. Given Freud's own rationalism, his wish to establish a dictatorship of the ego over the id and superego (as if an ego-dominated person could be anything more than a pathological narcissist), the neo-Kleinian shift from an emphasis upon loving concern for the other to a stress upon thinking and reality-testing (as if that could ever tell us right from wrong) represents a regression from Mrs. Klein's hard-won advance beyond both the father in and the father of psychoanalysis.

Although Hughes comments upon the essentially sociological nature of Freud's understanding of the superego as grounded in fear of rejection and consequent introjection of and identification with social authority via the parents' superegos, she does not elaborate upon the problems of moral relativism this generates. Although he mostly advanced a view of morality as socially constructed, in *Totem and Taboo* Freud (1913-14) described the remorse stemming from the killing of the ambivalently loved

primal father that led to the establishment of the moral law in the first place. In Freud's historical myth (and implied in his account of the oedipal development of the individual) guilt, instead of resulting from the superego, precedes and motivates its formation. Hughes does not really address the contradiction in Freud's thought between views of guilt as cause and as result of superego development. However she correctly notes that Klein's thinking about moral development builds upon the primordial ambivalence that leads to guilt for hating an object also loved and, hence, to reparative wishes. In other words, guilt has its deepest roots in a love/hate conflict intrinsic to human nature as such, whatever additional guilt we derive from socialization into particular cultures.

Hughes is to be congratulated for calling attention to important aspects of Melanie Klein's thinking—such as her insistence upon the role of guilt due to ambivalence even in psychotic conditions wherein it may be so deeply buried or split-off as to be virtually invisible (Hughes, 2008, p. 64). Certainly analysts schooled in relational, self and intersubjective approaches focused upon attuning empathically to conscious and preconscious experience will remain oblivious to its presence in psychosis and also in psychopathy and other narcissistic states in which depressive, as distinct from persecutory, anxiety is warded off by a range of essentially manic defences, as Joan Riviere so well understood as Hughes points out.

In relation to the cognitive turn in post-Kleinian thought, Hughes quotes (p. 82) from a note by Klein to Susan Isaacs in which she indicates what she feels is the latter's overemphasis upon unconscious phantasy to the relative neglect of the primitive ego's interest in and influence by reality. Hanna Segal responded to this concern, evolving a more balanced perspective that does greater justice to ego development and to what Freudians call primary and secondary process thinking, which Segal associates with symbolic equation and symbolic representation respectively. In so attending to the development and pathology of the ego and its capacity to think and test reality Segal in no way departs from the classical Kleinian stress on the role of object love in the ambivalence that generates concern and reparation and that motivates symbolism and sublimation. By way of contrast to this classical Kleinian stress upon the growth-promoting role of the *subject's* love, Bion's emphasis upon the role of the containing

object in enabling thinking and learning from experience seems to have contributed to an unfortunate post-Kleinian preoccupation with the role of *thinking* in moral development—unfortunate because as both Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1754) and Melanie Klein understood, morality is grounded not in thinking but in *feeling*. For Rousseau this was fellow-feeling or *pity*; for Klein it was feelings of love and gratitude toward the good object.

As Hughes herself recognizes this post-Kleinian emphasis upon the role of thinking in morality runs into difficulty in view of the fact/value disjunction: one cannot deduce an "ought" from an "is"; science is *descriptive* not *prescriptive*; we can reason from value premises but reason is incapable of authorizing or validating such premises. Hughes seeks to offset her well-justified anxiety in this respect by referencing in a footnote (p. 120) a recent philosophical study claiming to have undermined the fact/value disjunction but which, in my judgment, merely succeeds in complicating it to some degree. A good deal of modern philosophy seeks to complicate established axioms, sometimes giving the impression they have been overcome when, in reality, they have merely been complicated. In light of such complication the axiom may now seem unsophisticated. But sophistry has always sought through complication to baffle reason. It is true that clear thinking about facts is *relevant* to moral functioning: the fact that smoking causes cancer is relevant to my decision whether or not to smoke. But the fact that smoking may impair my health and shorten my life in no way proves that it is better to be healthy than ill, nor that life is worth living. Those are judgments beyond reason; they are grounded not in the subject's thinking but in *EROS*—in the subject's love or lack thereof.

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