EPILOGUE TO PART II: OMNIPOTENCE OR REALITY

In this Epilogue I shall pause to draw together, in a systematic way, the set of important discoveries which are fundamental to Kleinian thinking so far. These had all occurred before Klein's death in 1960, and had all been instigated by her. In this interlude, I will not draw on more clinical material. These discoveries form a set because they all concern a particular discrimination, one which can be viewed from a number of angles. Generally, it is the transition from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive position.

Projective identification Let us start with the discrimination that was emphasized by Bion (see Chapter 8). Projective identification was explicitly described by Klein as a means of evacuating bad parts of the self together with bad objects. It featured a high degree of violence which greatly disturbed the sense of identity and reality. At the other end of the spectrum Bion described how projective identification may be used, with less forceful impact, to communicate. At this least aggressive end there is no confusion over the identity of the self and object (putting oneself in another's shoes without forgetting who you or they are). The dimension is from violent intrusion to empathy.

Omnipotent phantasy When a person evacuates parts of the self in phantasy, they feel a sense of loss or depletion, as if these parts of the self had in actual fact gone, disappeared. The effect of this kind of primitive phantasy is that the individual feels as if the phantasy actually had a reality to it. There is a sense of the internal world as a reality too; if something is believed in, it is as good as having happened. If the person believes strongly enough that they are less of a person, the sense of the self will be affected in such a way that it will actually feel smaller, emptier, more depleted; this in turn will result in attitudes, feelings and behaviour based upon that sense of smallness, hollowness or emptiness. This is covered by a phrase coined by Freud, 'the omnipotence of fantasy'. It is to be contrasted with the kinds of phantasy where there remains some

awareness that it is 'simply' a phantasy. The discrimination is between phantasy that is so strong that it becomes determining of identity, attitudes, emotions and relationships; and phantasy enjoyed 'as a phantasy', and employed as imagination and the source of personal meaning. The first category of phantasies, called 'omnipotent' because they have an actual effect of some kind, can be said to be concrete; in the example of projective identification, it is as if some concrete lump of the person and their mind has actually been removed and placed in physical space elsewhere, into someone else. The omnipotence and concreteness, because of their 'real' effects, are more than just phantasies; they can also be regarded as real processes. There is an objective quality to their consequences as well as the subjective experience of them in phantasy. This is the *second* distinction: omnipotence contrasted with non-omnipotence.

Primitive defence mechanisms Freud hinted that the defence mechanisms of the very young infant may have a different quality from those of the neurotic defences. He hinted, too, that one of the differences may be the extra degree of hostility in the operation of those defences. Klein's results confirmed this: she described the primitive defence mechanisms of projection, splitting, identification, introjection and so on. These are in fact characterized both by aggression and also by operating as defences against the very early forms of aggressive impulses in the infant. Consequently, they are suffused with a very violent aggression. Klein contrasted them with the neurotic defences – the paradigm being repression – in the older child and adult. The primitive defence mechanisms, as we have seen (Chapter 2), have a subjective level of phantasy but also become psychological processes that determine basic aspects of the development of the early personality, especially in forming the sense of identity and of the self. They are modified in development – for instance, splitting of the personality with no contact between the parts becomes repression, where the split is between the conscious and unconscious parts of the mind which do interact (e.g. the dream in the example of *The man who split off his aggression*, p. 125). This distinction between primitive and neurotic defences is the *third* dimension.

PDF Compression, OCR, web optimization using a watermarked evaluation copy of CVISION PDFCompressor

Narcissism The formation of the sense of self and identity coheres, as we have seen, around the experience of a good object installed reasonably securely inside the person. This, in the early stages of development (and with varying degrees all through life), may entail an exaggeration of the goodness of the self, achieved through persistent evacuation of the parts of the self that are felt to be bad and the continual incorporation of good things from outside. Thus states of massive and unrealistic redistribution of good things and bad things between the self and others occur at times in infancy (and also at times of stress in later life); and they depend totally upon the operation of omnipotent phantasies, the primitive defence mechanisms of splitting, projection, introjection and identification. These states are called narcissistic, and the redistribution of the parts of the self is believed in intensely; but because they involve aspects of other people who may not go along with the redistribution of worth, these states are usually unstable and threaten the person with breakdown. This *fourth* distinction exists between, on the one hand, narcissistic object relations and, on the other, the recognition of the separate reality of others and oneself, who are all more realistic mixed entities, both good and bad.

Symbolization Later (in Chapter 11) we will see how symbols can be constructed in two ways. A symbol may represent what it symbolizes (its meaning) or it may actually be believed to *be* the thing it is supposed to represent. Although it will be described later, this *fifth* distinction, between two kinds of symbolization, is closely related to the distinction between omnipotent projective identification and empathy described above.

Identification The need to give up the omnipotence of phantasy and to address the reality of oneself and others is part of the process of maturation. The particular site of this struggle for greater acceptance of reality is the early stages of the Oedipus complex. An infant has to make a movement across a kind of mental space – from experiencing itself as part of a couple, mother/infant, to witnessing a couple, mother and father, from which the infant itself is excluded. This is a particularly difficult transition because of the intensity of the passions, both loving and murderous, which are

involved, and the Oedipus complex is particularly prominent in this developmental step. It is, however, a step which relates to the distinction I have been addressing between omnipotent phantasy and acceptance of reality. When Freud treated the Wolf Man, he discovered what he thought was an early trauma at maybe eighteen months of age, when the child had witnessed the parents in intercourse. Freud pointed out how the Wolf Man did not succeed in making that necessary psychological movement, but became preoccupied unconsciously with the parental intercourse by continually identifying himself with one or other of the partners. Because of the omnipotence of phantasy, he remained inserted into the parental intercourse through one identification or another. This seriously hampered his development. A more profitable development occurs in Freud's description of the little boy who accepts that he is *like* Daddy, and could do what Daddy does, *but not yet*. Freud thought that this act of delayed gratification was an important developmental step, but it is also a developmental step in the sense that I am talking about: there can be a recognition of being like Father, but without having any longer to believe one *is* Father – a similarity, yet a separateness. Identifying oneself as being like someone and identifying oneself as being equated with that person are two different forms of identification, corresponding to the two kinds of symbols. They are separate, and form the *sixth* discrimination between the early stages of the Oedipus complex and its mature form. Being someone, as a schizophrenic may believe he is the King of France, has the quality of omnipotence; being like someone has a different quality that comes from having given up the omnipotence and recognizing the separateness of the person one is like.

The death instinct We have just noted the final distinction in the last chapter: between envy and the more mature forms of aggression, jealousy and competitiveness. In the latter the capacity for appreciation of goodness and life survives; whereas in the former, envy, the attacks upon goodness, beauty and life are dominant, and remove all those good characteristics. This is the *seventh* and final distinction.

PDF compression, OCR, web optimization using a watermarked evaluation copy of CVISION PDFCompressor

Summary The different aspects of this dimension may be set out in the form of a table:

	Paranoid-schizoid	Depressive
Projective identification	Evacuation	Empathy
Phantasy	Omnipotent	Realistic
Defences	Primitive	Neurotic
Object relations	Narcissistic	Differentiated and reality-tested identity
Symbols	Symbolic-equation	Symbols proper
Identification	Within the parental couple	Witnessing the couple
Death instinct	Envy	Jealousy, competitiveness

This multivalent set of discriminations are all part and parcel of the same developmental step. It is a wavering step and everyone, whatever their stage and age of adult maturity, will tend tooscillate from time to time from one side to the other. Mostly there is a general trend throughout life towards the right-hand side of the table; and this represents growing maturity with age. But some people become seriously held up in these movements, a stasis which is examined further in Part III, where recent developments will be discussed which concentrate on further detailed aspects of the bundle of distinctions summarized here, and derive from new aspects of technique that have built on the discoveries covered in Part II. In Part III we will examine these recent developments by Klein's contemporaries and students.

PDF compression, OCR, web optimization using a watermarked evaluation copy of CVISION PDFCompressor