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Bringing up baby: The psychoanalytic infant comes of age

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BOOK REVIEW

Dianna T. Kenny. *Bringing up baby: The psychoanalytic infant comes of age* London: Karnac Books, 2013, 381 pp.

Dianna T. Kenny is a professor of psychology at the University of Sydney and a member of the Australian and American Psychological Societies. Her specialties are developmental psychology and developmental psychopathology. She serves as research and education officer on the national executive and the psychoanalytically informed interest group of the Australian Psychological Society.

Kenny has succeeded here in writing an intriguing treatise on child development from a mainly psychoanalytic perspective. She covers the whole history from Freud until the focus on relational phenomena in today's psychodynamic theory, and concludes by discussing findings in neuroscience. She relates pertinent aspects of psychoanalytic theories in a clear and respectful way, but this does not prevent her putting forward an uncompromising critique of issues that she finds to be mistaken. The result is vital and stimulating reading.

One example is her discussion of the history of Little Hans. Beginning with excerpts from Freud's story, she continues with an attachment theory account, a learning theory version, and finally a retrospective historical account based on Kurt Eissler's interviews with Hans and his father in 1952. Kenny unveils in a pedagogic way how Freud went seriously astray when he let preconceived theoretical speculations be his compass. In this way, he discarded observations that would have led him to a more adequate understanding of Hans' problems and to a more fruitful theoretic construct than the Oedipus complex. A major mistake was Freud's conflating of two motivational systems: attachment and sexuality. This was already pointed out by Ferenczi in 1933, and Bowlby explicitly separated the systems in his attachment theory. It is tragic that both Ferenczi and Bowlby have been very ill treated by leading protagonists of the psychoanalytic movement. Kenny's conclusion that "It is therefore difficult to know what we can learn from this case other than how observation can be biased by theoretical preconceptions and how not to conduct a child psychoanalysis" (p. 51) is well spoken.

Based on current research on infant development, Kenny takes issue with the predominance of stage-based approaches in both psychoanalytic theories

and Piaget's cognitive model. She notes that "Stages are theoretical notions rather than objective realities that are useful in organizing specific observations into coherent conceptual framework. They are descriptive rather than explanatory" (p. 14). Kenny cites research and observations showing that "contrary to the assumption of stage-based theories, development at the beginning of life is neither deficient, nor incompetent and begins neither in a state of undifferentiation nor with a set of discrete capacities that are not integrated" (p. 244). Regarding Freud's psychosexual stage theory, she states in the final chapter that it is "inadequate, and, indeed, wrong" (p. 243). She also points out that current findings are in contradistinction to Winnicott's statement that there is no such thing as a baby. She writes, "These positions are no longer tenable in light of infant research showing the opposite, that is, that babies are from birth imitators, observers, learners, communicators, and interpersonal partners" (p. 247). I assume, however, that Winnicott might be willing to subscribe to this description and still argue that the baby is predominantly imitating, observing, learning from, communicating with, and being interpersonal with his or her mother or other caregiver to such an extent that they may be seen both as individuals and as a unity.

In a section on early traumatic experiences, Kenny observes that Freud's original trauma model was not so far removed from current models arising from infant research, but that "classical psychoanalytic theory represented a chronic failure in attunement that was experienced as traumatising the patient" (p. 194). I find Kenny's discussion well presented, but I miss the inclusion of Ferenczi's early and courageous criticism of the classical stance and his reformulation of theory and clinical practice. In addition, contributions from the Ferenczi revival movement, well represented among the editorial board of this journal, are missing.

A special section regards "mental representations," which Kenny sees as "so central to an understanding of all current theories of infant development, that it deserves special attention" (p. 173). The conceptualisation of these phenomena has a long history in psychoanalysis, with some variation of name and scope. Some later concepts are Bowlby's "internal working models," Stern's "representations of interactions that have been generalized RIGS," Zelnick's and Buchholz's

2 Book Review

“unconscious organizing structure of organization,” and Bebee’s and Lachman’s “representations [as] relatively persistent, organised classifications about an expected interactive sequence.” Kenny concludes that:

There is a long tradition in psychoanalysis, beginning with Freud but crystallised in the object relations theories and formalized in the attachment, intersubjective and relational schools, that internalised representations of relationships are the foundations of psychic structure that influence personality development, affect psychological health throughout the lifespan, and guide reactions to the object world, both internal and external. (p. 181)

This volume should be a valuable ingredient in all courses on child development in the training of

psychoanalysts and psychotherapists. The book also has much to offer teachers and preschool pedagogues, as well as anyone who ponders over child development. For those of us who have lived in the psychoanalytic world for a long time, this work offers a reunion with a number of colleagues we have met in seminars, conferences, supervision and sometimes as personal friends. In this way, reading the book opens a chance to consider our own itinerary in the virtual and real psychoanalytic landscapes.

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