

Psychoanalytic Horizons

Critical Theory Between Klein and Lacan
A Dialogue

Amy Allen & Mari Ruti



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Critical Theory Between Klein and Lacan

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PREFACE

AA: Let me begin by telling the story of how this project came to be. It started as a casual dinner conversation when Mari was visiting Penn State to give a talk on Jacques Lacan's seminar on anxiety. Prior to her visit, I had been working for a while on Melanie Klein as part of a project on the relationship between psychoanalysis and Frankfurt School critical theory. Over the dinner that followed Mari's lecture, we had a lively conversation about her presentation, her work on Lacan in relation to critical theory, and my research on Klein, during which many points of connection and overlapping themes emerged. These convergences surprised us because we had both to some degree accepted without question the conventional assessment that Klein and Lacan are theoretically and ideologically so far apart that trying to bring them into conversation with each other was intellectually implausible.

Before that evening, although I had been interested in Mari's work, I had thought of my choice of Klein as my psychoanalytic touchstone as an *alternative* to the more common critical theoretical engagement with Lacan. That first conversation was the dawning of the realization that the relationship between psychoanalysis and critical theory needn't be framed in terms of an either/or choice: Klein vs. Lacan. At the end of the evening, as we were leaving the restaurant, I said to Mari: "We should write a book on Klein and Lacan together." Mari's enthusiastic response was: "That's a *great* idea!"

Under ordinary circumstances, that would have been the end of it: another engaging post-lecture dinner discussion and an interesting idea for a book that would never materialize. But—and on some level I must have known this when I made the suggestion—Mari Ruti isn't someone who merely talks about writing books: she has published twelve of them. As a consequence, my offhand suggestion became a reality relatively quickly. In an email dated the day after

our dinner Mari said: “We should totally write a book about Klein and Lacan. I think that this would be very cool.” She then continued to gently encourage and nurture the idea, touching base every so often to remind me of it, until we were able to find time in our schedules to meet for a series of taped conversations that form the backbone of this book.

We chose the following themes to organize our dialogue: subjectivity, anxiety, affect, love, creativity, and politics. The following year we met again to revise the transcripts of our conversations into the exchange that follows. During this revision process, we realized that the question of primary fusion—of whether the baby in the first months of its life is wholly merged with its primary caretaker or whether there’s a degree of separation, and therefore of intersubjectivity, from the very beginning—was a prominent and recurring theme that ran through our conversations. We therefore decided to create a separate chapter for the topic.

Citations were a part of our original conversations because our tape recorder was surrounded by major texts of Klein and Lacan from which we frequently quoted in order to elucidate our points. I want to add that I sometimes talked about Lacan and Mari sometimes talked about Klein because, prior to our conversations, we had made an effort to familiarize ourselves with the basics of each other’s fields. In the revision process, we added endnotes, including some references to relevant secondary sources. Yet we also strove to retain as much of the conversational and somewhat provisional tone of our dialogue as possible.

The initial idea for the book is also its primary goal: to continue the dialogue that had begun to take shape during our dinner about the relationship between Kleinian and Lacanian psychoanalysis—which has received surprisingly little attention¹—and to examine the implications of their approaches for critical theory. Three features of our project make it distinctive. First, this book is a genuine dialogue. Rather than merely laying out Klein and Lacan’s positions side by side—a method that seems to suggest an either/or choice—the text unfolds as a conversation in which we respond directly to each other’s questions, objections, and interpretations; we undertake a rigorous yet generous intellectual exchange in order to explore the similarities and differences between Klein and Lacan. Although the claim that Klein and Lacan aren’t as far apart as they have frequently been assumed to be is a refrain that runs through

this book, our goal isn't to get rid of the divergences between these thinkers. Rather, our objective is to map out points of convergence between them in such a way that familiar criticisms—for example, Lacan's famous critique of Klein's notion of the integration of the ego—can be reassessed in ways that throw the remaining points of disagreement into greater relief.

Klein and Lacan are among the most influential psychoanalytic theorists after Freud. Their work has had profound implications for how academics from various disciplines—as well as clinicians working in the Kleinian and Lacanian traditions—have understood topics such as subjectivity, intersubjectivity, autonomy, agency, desire, affect, trauma, history, progress, and the potential for individual and collective (and even political) change. Although Lacan's oeuvre has been mined extensively by critical theorists, his work has often been interpreted in an overly negative and antirelational manner. At the same time, the recent recuperation of Klein by critics who are interested in a more “reparative” inflection of theorizing—who have adopted the rhetoric of reparation as an antidote to what they perceive as the destructive (or “paranoid”) tendencies of critical theory—has tended to obscure Klein's emphasis on primary aggression, negativity, and ambivalence. We offer alternative interpretations of Klein and Lacan that bring out their complexities while walking the fine line between the negative and the generative.

Second, this book offers an accessible introduction to the theories of Klein and Lacan at the same time as it delves deeply into what we deem to be their major theoretical contributions. Although we both know a fair amount about both Klein and Lacan, the fact that I'm more thoroughly trained in the Kleinian tradition than Mari is—and that Mari is more thoroughly trained in the Lacanian tradition than I am—necessitated lucid explanations regarding foundational concepts, such as Klein's paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions and Lacan's notions of constitutive lack and sublimation. This ensures that non-expert readers will be able to process the text without difficulty. Yet our conversations are comprehensive, detailed, and nuanced enough—not to mention unique in exploring central psychoanalytic themes in a space *between* Klein and Lacan—to cater to the needs of expert readers.

Third, as I've already emphasized, we're interested not only in understanding how Klein and Lacan might speak—or in some

instances not speak—to each other but also in thinking through the ramifications of their work for critical theory. In this context, the fact that we’re working with different definitions of critical theory, operating within different disciplinary contexts, and engaging with different intellectual interlocutors, adds breadth to our exchange. Indeed, given that a concern with something that we both call “critical theory” is what animates our interest in psychoanalysis and therefore frames our entire dialogue, it makes sense for us to begin with a discussion of how our different intellectual trajectories inform our conceptions of critical theory.

MR: I agree that it’s necessary to explain our divergent intellectual formations to clarify that when we talk about psychoanalysis and critical theory, we’re approaching the theme from different places of expertise. Amy is thoroughly trained in the Frankfurt School tradition of critical theory, including its Habermasian legacies, whereas my training is in critical theory more broadly defined, in what critics often simply call “contemporary theory,” “posthumanist theory,” or “progressive theory.” By this I mean the kind of theory that has profited from the insights of French poststructuralism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Foucauldian biopolitics, Agamben’s notion of bare life, and other continental philosophical trends, frequently combining these trends with cultural studies, political critique, ethnic studies, postcolonial studies, deconstructive feminism, and queer theory.

We are both familiar with the thinkers who served as precursors to both the Frankfurt School and my broader version of critical theory: Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Kierkegaard, de Saussure, Heidegger, Arendt, Fanon, Sartre, de Beauvoir, and so on. At the same time, although I know the early Frankfurt School—Benjamin, Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse—relatively well, I haven’t read a great deal of Habermas, in large part because my genre of critical theory has flatly rejected him for his rationalist tendencies. I’m in fact more familiar with the scholarship of post-Habermasian feminists who criticize aspects of his work, such as Seyla Benhabib, Nancy Fraser, and Amy herself. Moreover, my engagement with the Frankfurt School stops there, whereas Amy is immersed in the most recent debates in the field—debates that scholars in my version of critical theory don’t seem to have much awareness of. Amy also knows Foucault better than I do. Finally, while Amy

was trained in a philosophy department, I was trained, first, in the social sciences, and later (and more extensively), in contemporary theory in a comparative literature department that allowed me to focus almost exclusively on continental philosophy, critical theory, psychoanalysis, and related fields. My thanks go to Alice Jardine, Barbara Johnson, Marjorie Garber, Susan Suleiman, Eric Downing, Svetlana Boym—and, well, Julia Kristeva—for making this possible.

Throughout her career, Amy has been making her way from the Habermasian tradition toward my version of critical theory—at least that's how I've understood her scholarship. For instance, she has been trying to convince her peers within the Frankfurt School tradition that the irrational side of human experience—which psychoanalysis is exceptionally capable of exploring—should continue to play a part in post-Habermasian Frankfurt School theory, as it certainly did in the early Frankfurt School tradition. I in turn have chafed against some of the more excessive features of progressive theory, such as its semi-autonomic celebration of the annihilation of the subject and its by now almost ritualistic rejection of everything that even hints at agency, autonomy, or normative justice.

I of course understand the historical reasons for the refutation of these tropes, which have to do with the ways in which progressive theory has positioned itself in opposition to everything that's associated with the Enlightenment, because there's no question that the ideals of the Enlightenment can't be dissociated from problematic notions of self-transparency, sovereignty, rationality, and mastery. From these notions, it's legitimate to draw a link to Western imperialism, slavery, and other atrocities, with the result that the motivations for rejecting them are often politically sound. Nevertheless, I've been uncomfortable with critical-theoretical models that valorize desubjectivation and the pulverization of the subject—what Lacanians call “subjective destitution”—because I can't see how these models help precarious subjects who already feel shattered by collective inequalities, such as racism. I'm also suspicious of these models because their fetishization has become the default position in my field. I believe that when an intellectual orientation becomes habitual, it loses its critical edge: it becomes something that critics say just because they know that they are supposed to say it. As early as my dissertation—which became my first book—I stopped wanting to simply repeat customary positions without thinking them through.

Throughout my career I've been looking for a conceptual middle ground, which psychoanalysis provides in the sense that it gives us a decentered, fragmented, and partly irrational subject without thereby advocating the complete destruction of the subject. That said, some Lacanians have taken Lacanian theory in the direction of destruction by valorizing the death drive. But that's not my Lacan: although I don't ignore the death drive, I simply don't believe that Lacan would have wanted his analysands to either fall into psychosis or damage themselves, which is why my version of Lacanian theory is centered on the question of how to keep living when there's no cure for your constitutive lack, maladaptation, and disorientation. In looking for this middle ground, I've found Amy's work extremely productive and thought provoking because she has been exploring the irrational side of life without thereby abandoning her preoccupation with agency and normative justice.

I've long felt that Amy and I have been approaching the same kinds of preoccupations about subjectivity, psychic life, agency, ethics, and politics from versions of critical theory that many critics see as intrinsically antithetical to each other: I've been making my way from progressive theory's wholesale rejection of the humanist subject—a rejection about which I have significant reservations even if I in principle support it—toward autonomy, reason, agency, and normative justice, whereas Amy has been making her way from the Habermasian Frankfurt School tradition—the tradition of communicative action and normative justice—toward the more irrational side of critical theory, including the early Frankfurt School. This is perhaps most evident in her *The End of Progress*,² where she returns to Adorno and puts considerable pressure on the ideal of progress, broadly understood.

As a result, when Amy suggested that we collaborate on a project on Klein, Lacan, and critical theory, I jumped at the opportunity. I then added the idiotic idea that we should tape the book as a dialogue, which placed us in the terrifying position of going about the project semi-spontaneously, without the usual support systems of a scholarly undertaking. I reckon that for both of us the experience has been intense but also extremely rewarding.

AA: I think that recording our conversations and making the transcripts of these conversations the starting point for our book

was a *brilliant* approach. It's true that it was terrifying—and not only in the initial stage of our taping sessions but also in reading the transcripts—yet also incredibly liberating and, yes, rewarding.

With respect to our different intellectual trajectories, what you said sounds right to me. I would only complicate a little bit your description of my path to—and through—the Frankfurt School. Initially, when I was in graduate school in the 1990s, I was mostly interested in Foucault and feminist theory and even stubbornly uninterested in Frankfurt School critical theory. This was somewhat self-defeating because at the time, there was a tremendous amount of intellectual energy and excitement around the Frankfurt School at Northwestern, where I earned my doctorate: it was one of the things that my department was best known for. Around that time, Habermas retired from Frankfurt and started coming to Northwestern regularly to offer seminars, and many of the best graduate students in the department were working on Habermas with Tom McCarthy. But for some reason at that time I didn't identify myself as someone who worked in that field.

As a result, my dissertation, which became my first book, barely discusses Habermas. The book addresses feminist theoretical debates about power through the work of Foucault, Arendt, and Butler. It was only later, when I was working on my second book—which grew out of my desire to correct what I thought were significant misunderstandings and misinterpretations of Foucault and Butler by Habermasian critical theorists—that I began to think of myself as engaged in the project of critical theory as the field is understood by the Frankfurt School. However, largely because of my early interest in Foucault and feminist theory, I've always attempted to reconcile mainstream Habermasian and post-Habermasian Frankfurt School critical social theory with what you call progressive theory. For me this has happened primarily through my work on Foucault, but I've also been interested in making broader connections to feminist theory, queer theory, and, more recently, postcolonial theory, with the consequence that my work has always drawn me into a wider orbit of critical theory than what is considered to fit within the parameters of present-day Frankfurt School preoccupations.

For instance, *The End of Progress* aims to open up Frankfurt School critical theory to a conversation with feminist, queer, and postcolonial theory in part by establishing an alternative lineage to the Habermasian vein of the Frankfurt School, one that runs

from Adorno to Foucault. Moreover, broadening the conception of Frankfurt School critical theory is something that I've tried to do not just through my own work, but also institutionally, through the book series that I edit for Columbia University Press. This series was envisioned as a space for creating linkages between some of the different wings of critical theory. As I see it, what connects the different understandings of critical theory that you and I have—and what makes them distinct from, say, critical literary studies—is that we strive to critique existing social, cultural, ethical, and political practices, structures, and institutions. As a result, your work on Lacanian ethics and the political implications of Lacanian theory is critical theory in the sense that I define and practice it, even if it doesn't have anything to do with Habermas.

MR: You're right that, despite my training in a literature department, I don't do critical literary studies, which causes consternation among some of my colleagues but which my graduate students seem to appreciate. I'm much more interested in sociopolitical critique and in using theory to examine the fundamentals of the human condition. Furthermore, one reason that our approaches have always seemed so compatible is that both of us are constantly trying to bridge divisions that appear insurmountable. In one of my recent books, *The Ethics of Opting Out*,³ I attempt to convince colleagues in queer theory that there's no reason to think that Foucault and Lacan are incompatible. Of course there are differences, and of course Foucault, for good reasons, staged an immense critique of psychoanalysis early in his career, but when you look at the main outlines of their theorization over time, there are so many intersections that I think that, much of the time, they lead more or less to the same conceptual place.

You might find this amusing: One of the peer reviewers of my book on Levinas and Lacan was overall pleased with the manuscript⁴—the verdict was “publish as it stands”—but they were enormously exasperated by the fact that in the last chapter I discuss Habermas in the context of the scholarship of Fraser and yourself. Their question was—and I paraphrase—“Why the hell are you even talking about Habermas?” In this sense, veering off the well-trodden path of one's field can be tricky. Sometimes it makes colleagues furious, though I've never understood why. Whatever his failings, it's not like Habermas is a total moron.

This point is relevant for this book because, as you have noted, there are critics who believe that Klein and Lacan have positively nothing in common, and that it's consequently a form of intellectual heresy to even mention them in the same paragraph. However, because both of us are used to attempting to reconcile the irreconcilable, I believe that this book manages to foreground previously ignored convergences in the theories of these two psychoanalytic giants. As you said, our aim isn't to pretend that Klein and Lacan are always on the same page. Nonetheless, our conversations generate nodes of commonality with striking frequency.

AA: I agree that there are risks to attempting to stage conversations between theoretical positions that are generally thought to be opposed. Yet like you, this is what I've always tried to do in my work, starting with my first article on Foucault and feminism, running through my book on the Foucault-Habermas debate, and continuing in my recent work on Frankfurt School critical theory and postcolonial theory. There's no doubt that this approach can anger readers who have a lot invested in certain divisions between fields or within their own field. Ultimately, however, I believe that intellectual work can only remain vibrant and exciting to the extent that we, as intellectuals, remain open to different—sometimes even competing—perspectives and allow ourselves to be transformed by the encounter between them.

The conversations that follow unfold organically, with one theme leading to the next. Nevertheless, it might help to orient the reader to outline the basic organization of this book. Conversation 1 opens with Klein and Lacan's theories of subjectivity, including their understandings of the formation of the subject. Although our discussion traverses a variety of issues—including the different notions of phantasy/fantasy in Klein and Lacan; the Kleinian paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions; the Lacanian emphasis on lack as the foundation of subjectivity; the complex relationship between the intersubjective and intrapsychic; and the importance of the drives—the conversation culminates at Klein and Lacan's divergent conceptions of the ego. Whereas for Lacan the goal of analysis is to weaken an ego that's regarded as overly grandiose and narcissistic, Klein's analytic goal is to strengthen the ego. Although this may appear as an intractable discrepancy between them, our

conversation reveals that Klein's distinctive vision of what it means to strengthen the ego—which entails enriching it by incorporating a greater degree of unconscious content and increasing its tolerance for ambivalence, ambiguity, and conflict—is more compatible with Lacanian theory than it initially appears.

Conversation 2 addresses the question of whether either Klein or Lacan accept the concept of primary fusion. Although both Klein and Lacan have been read as endorsing this concept, we argue that such readings are erroneous. Allen maintains that Klein's view that the infant is object related from the start entails a rejection of primary fusion, whereas Ruti draws on Lacan's critique of Michael Balint to show that Lacan doesn't endorse primary fusion either. For both Klein and Lacan, intersubjectivity exists from the beginning of life, albeit in different ways. In the course of this discussion, we also assess Lacan's critique of Klein's biologism, the views of both thinkers on the ambivalence of psychic experiences, and their differing conceptions of the death drive.

In the third conversation, we focus on anxiety, a central theme for both Klein and Lacan. We start with Allen's account of Klein's distinction between persecutory and depressive anxiety and her understanding of the connections between anxiety and the death drive (or primary aggression). We then turn to Ruti's explanation of three varieties of anxiety that she extracts from Lacan's seminar on this topic—each of which, according to Ruti, highlights the importance of intersubjectivity in Lacan's work. After discussing the relationship between Klein's understanding of anxiety and Lacan's three varieties, we consider how love serves as antidote to anxiety for Klein whereas creativity and sublimation play a similar role for Lacan. The conversation closes with an analysis of the distinction between constitutive and circumstantial (context-specific) forms of lack or wounding in both Klein and Lacan.

Conversation 4 considers the relationship between Klein and Lacan in light of the recent rise of affect theory, which in some instances has come to be seen as a politically and collectively attuned alternative to the more subject-centered theories of psychoanalysis. While affect theorists have been inspired by Klein's account of reparation, they have tended to reject Lacan as a practitioner of paranoid critique. Our discussion calls into question the terms and limits of this debate. Allen suggests that Klein's view is more negativistic and therefore more inherently ambivalent

than the picture of reparative scholarship that emerges from affect theory. Similarly, while acknowledging the valuable insights that have emerged from affect theory—particularly with respect to circumstantial forms of wounding—Ruti defends the Lacanian emphasis on the subject's constitutive lack-in-being, proposing that constitutive and context-specific forms of traumatization aren't mutually exclusive. Our conversation converges on the idea that critical theory needs a synthesis of Kleinian and Lacanian perspectives rather than an either/or choice.

Conversation 5 analyzes (mostly romantic) love, opening with the question of whether love can function as an antidote to aggression or anxiety. Ruti stresses that for Lacan love is a derailing—even a traumatizing—force, and that this feature of love, coupled with the subject's constitutive lack, explains why Lacan doesn't consider love as a feasible route to psychic integration and harmony. Allen in turn draws attention to the complexities of Klein's account of love, which is ambivalent to the core; this implies that complete integration and harmony are impossible for Klein as well. As a result, Klein and Lacan seem to converge on the idea that love is anything but harmonious insofar as it requires—in Kleinian terms—tolerating ambivalence and—in Lacanian terms—loving what is inadequate, wounded, or disorienting about the other. We argue that for both Klein and Lacan, the ambivalence of love is a function of the centrality and ineliminability of the death drive.

Conversation 6 tackles the relationship between lack, loss, and mourning on the one hand and creativity and sublimation on the other. We start with a discussion of Lacan's scathing but, in our opinion, uncharitable critique of Klein's understanding of sublimation. We note that, like Lacan, Klein believes that creativity is founded upon and made possible by loss. Moreover, although Klein herself tends to view the death drive in negative terms, some contemporary Kleinians have drawn closer to Lacan's argument regarding the death drive as essential for any act of creativity. Similarly, Hanna Segal's application of Kleinian insights to aesthetics opens up interesting connections to Lacan's understanding of creativity as involving the commingling of the signifier and the jouissance of the real. Drawing on Segal's work, we envision a Kleinian analogue to the Lacanian idea that creativity requires riding the death drive as close to the limit of subjective intelligibility

as possible—that is, courting the possibility of psychosis—without being destroyed in the process.

Although the sociopolitical implications of both Klein and Lacan are discussed throughout this book, our final conversation makes politics its primary theme. For Allen, the critical and political importance of psychoanalysis lies in its realistic theory of subjectivity, its ability to diagnose contemporary political realities, and its conception of resistance. At the same time, while Klein offers powerful insights into the first two of these topics, Ruti's presentation of Lacan—in particular of his conception of the real as a resource for resisting the demands of the hegemonic social order—suggests that his work provides more resources for the third. And yet, as we stress throughout this book, Klein and Lacan converge on the insistence that there's no definitive cure for the subject's aggressivity (Klein) or lack-in-being (Lacan). This idea has profound implications not only for how we envision the contours of human life but also for how critical theorists understand concepts such as progress and emancipation.

1

Subjectivity

MR: We agreed to start our conversations about Klein and Lacan with basic accounts of their versions of how the subject becomes a subject, how the human being becomes a human being. Because I've been more influenced by Lacan, my grasp of the Kleinian story is less precise than it could be. I would appreciate it if you could explain themes such as the body in bits and pieces, splitting, gradual ego integration, the paranoid-schizoid position, the depressive position, and so on.

AA: The core of Klein's understanding of subject formation consists of her account of the two positions: the paranoid-schizoid and the depressive positions. Perhaps the first thing to note about her theory is the language of positions itself. The term *position* is an alternative to concepts such as stages or phases of development, which means that the positions aren't stages that one passes through and leaves behind. Rather, they persist throughout life, and individuals can and do oscillate between them, particularly in times of stress. In other words, the term *position* refers to what Hanna Segal describes as a configuration of object relations, anxieties, and defenses that characterize the individual's entire lifespan.¹ Klein also mentions in several places that the two positions can blend into one another, so that there can be depressive anxieties in the paranoid-schizoid position, and vice versa, which implies that the distinction between them is really more conceptual or analytical than substantive.

Another point to make about the language of positions is that each of the positions is, for Klein, linked to a specific modality of psychological disturbance: the paranoid-schizoid position is connected to psychotic states or anxieties whereas the depressive

position is connected to neurotic states or anxieties.² And that's interesting because in this sense Klein could be seen as offering an account of what Joel Whitebook, following Hans Loewald, calls the psychotic core of the psyche.³ The idea is that there's an archaic core of the psyche that persists in all of us that's psychotic in character and that we might learn something about subjectivity by investigating this psychotic core. For Whitebook, the core is psychotic because the infant initially exists in a state of fusion or merger with its mother or other primary caregiver, so that there's no differentiation between self and object, and therefore no coherent or unified self. For reasons that we'll discuss later, I don't believe that Klein accepts this story about primordial fusion. But she does maintain that the core of the psyche is psychotic in the sense that in the paranoid-schizoid position one experiences one's objects and also one's self as unintegrated, incoherent, and split, and that, for her, is what psychosis means. This isn't to say that all children are psychotic, but it does explain why Klein claims that "every child will periodically exhibit psychotic phenomena."⁴

Two more specific ideas are important for understanding Klein's theory of positions. The first has to do with the primacy of aggression, or the death drive. Klein believes that the death drive is in operation from the beginning of life, and that the infant perceives this drive as a threat to its existence. In this respect, Klein took herself to be developing the ideas about the duality of the life and death drives explored in Freud's late work. She once said that she regarded Freud's late drive theory to be "a tremendous advance in the understanding of the mind."⁵ But she also thinks that Freud didn't give enough weight to aggression and that he never sufficiently integrated his account of aggression into his overall theory, and that's something she's trying to do.

Unlike Freud, who didn't believe that there could be any content to the fear of death because we don't ever experience anything analogous to it, Klein held that there is from the very beginning of life an unconscious fear of death. This idea follows directly from her conviction that all drives have psychological correlates, which means that if there's a death drive operative from the get-go, it must have a psychological analogue. This psychological analogue, for Klein, is the fear of annihilation.⁶ Klein believes that this points to a fundamental and ineliminable conflict between the life and death drives that, in turn, is the initial cause of anxiety. Moreover, since

the conflict between the life and death drives is ineradicable, so too is anxiety. This is why anxiety is absolutely central to Klein's conception of the subject. For her, the primary job of the early ego—and for her there's a rudimentary, incoherent, and unintegrated ego in place from the beginning of life—is to try to master anxiety. In addition, mastering anxiety is, for Klein, the main psychological task of the adult as well, as well as the goal of psychoanalysis.

The second key idea to understanding the Kleinian positions is her conception of the object. For Klein, object relations are in place from the onset of life. The first object is the mother, specifically her breast. This way of talking obviously raises important worries about whether or not Klein endorses biological essentialism—a topic I know we'll discuss later. For now I want to emphasize that what's interesting about Klein's claim that object relations are present from the beginning of life is that it appears to entail a rejection not only of Freud's initial conception of primary narcissism—which supposed that the infant was initially in a state of self-sufficiency and only later came to relate to others—but also of his later conception of primary fusion with the mother (which, as I just mentioned, Whitebook accepts).⁷ I know that we'll return to this theme as well. At this point, I merely want to say that Klein's rejection of the idea of primary fusion goes hand in hand with her claim that there exists a rudimentary ego from the beginning. Simply put, the infant can't be in a state of undifferentiated fusion, union, or merger because there's already an elementary ego in place that's relating to an object. So, for example, Klein says that “there is no instinctual urge, no anxiety situation, no mental process which does not involve objects, external or internal; in other words, object-relations are at the *centre* of emotional life.”⁸

With all of this as background, we can turn to the paranoid-schizoid position, which is the starting point for subject formation for Klein. In this position, as a result of the internal operation of the death drive, the infant finds itself in a state of extreme anxiety. Klein calls this type of anxiety “persecutory anxiety,” which consists of the fear of the annihilation of the ego that I alluded to a moment ago.⁹ The early ego attempts to master this anxiety in two ways. First, it directs its aggression outward toward the primary object, which is the breast, for example by biting the breast, which Klein interprets as a matter of acting out a phantasy of devouring the breast. Second, it projects its aggression onto its primary object, which it then

experiences as a persecutory entity with the power to annihilate it: it's now the object rather than the infant itself that becomes the site of aggression. Although this second strategy may seem counterintuitive, it helps the infant to master the anxiety caused by the death drive by getting rid of or expelling the badness and danger it feels inside itself by projecting it onto an external object. This has the effect of externalizing the internal operation of the death drive, and therefore of putting some distance between the death drive and the ego.

However, this projection also requires, for Klein, a splitting of the breast in order to protect the good breast, which is the object to which the infant is libidinally attached. Klein doesn't particularly stress this point—she puts more emphasis on the primacy of aggression—but aggression has to come together, even at the very beginning, with love or libidinal attachment because otherwise the primary object wouldn't be an object at all. As she puts it, “The power of love ... is there in the baby as well as the destructive forces, and finds its first fundamental expression in the baby's attachment to his mother's breast.”¹⁰ Thus, the infant is in a complicated and highly ambivalent situation. Its projection of the persecutory anxiety caused by the fear of annihilation—caused in turn by the operation of the death drive—onto the breast necessitates the splitting of the breast into good and bad parts. This activity of splitting is central to the paranoid-schizoid position. In the wake of this splitting, the good breast becomes the one that nourishes and loves the ego, gratifying its wishes for fulfillment, while the bad breast is the one that hates, attacks, and attempts to destroy it.

But the story is even more complicated than this because there are complex dynamics of projection and introjection involving both the good and the bad breast. As I mentioned, the infant projects its aggression onto the primary object, creating the bad breast, but it also projects its love and libidinal impulses outward, thereby creating the phantasy of the good or gratifying breast. At the same time, the infant *introjects* the good breast, which enables it to defend itself against its anxiety. In this way, the good breast becomes its internal protector, and comes to form the core of the developing ego, the entity around which the ego “expands and develops.”¹¹ Yet the infant also introjects the bad breast, which then heightens its sense of danger and anxiety, because now the persecutory object is both outside and inside the ego. This means that the split object that's characteristic of the paranoid-schizoid position goes hand in

hand with a split inside the ego. The result of this splitting is that the ego is disintegrated or incoherent—or, as Klein puts it, “in bits.”¹²

The depressive position, which follows the paranoid-schizoid position, and which counters some of the extreme splitting of the latter, is, for Klein, in some sense a developmental achievement because it's marked by a greater integration of both the ego and of the primary object—though we'll have to talk more about what integration means for her because the matter is more complicated than one might assume. Also, as I've already stressed, Klein doesn't believe that it's ever entirely possible to transcend the paranoid-schizoid position, that it's part of the adult's psychic constitution as well. But for our present purposes, let me just say that the key moment in the transition from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position occurs when the mother is recognized as a whole object. At one point, Klein dates this transition to the moment when the infant first recognizes its mother, which happens early—at four or five months of age—and it would be interesting to contrast this claim with Lacan's account of the mirror stage, because for Klein this isn't just about recognizing the other but also about self-recognition: the infant's recognition of its mother as a whole object enables it to recognize itself as a coherent ego.

When the infant is able to recognize the mother as a whole object, it realizes that the object that it has been destroying in its phantasies is the same object that it also loves and depends on. This realization leads to what Klein calls depressive anxiety. Whereas persecutory anxiety results from the fear of the ego's annihilation, depressive anxiety is caused by the fear of the loss of the loved object, a fear that results from the way in which the ego has managed its persecutory anxiety by directing its aggression toward this very object. Consequently, Klein's depressive position is closely bound up with guilt, the fear of loss, mourning, and ultimately the drive for reparation, which is the urge to repair the damage that was done, whether in reality or in phantasy, to the object.

Many readers of Klein stop here, with her account of the depressive position as the hallmark of psychological maturity. But Klein actually talks a lot, particularly in her early work, about *working through* or *overcoming* the depressive position, which implies that for her there's something beyond the depressive position.¹³ However, as far as I can tell, she never describes this beyond very precisely, nor does she ever give it a name or describe it as a new, third position. As a

result, it's unclear what exactly it means for her to work through the depressive position.¹⁴ But the way I've come to understand it is that it's basically an extension or a deepening of the basic features of the depressive position rather than something radically distinct from it. Working through the depressive position seems to involve moving from the initial experience of depressive anxiety to a greater tolerance of ambivalence, a more secure establishment of the whole object, and an increasing capacity for reparation.

All of this is to say that, for Klein, subject formation, if it goes well, enables the working through of the depressive position, which in turn involves both the secure internalization of the good object and the tolerance of the fundamental ambivalence of one's relationship to the object—that is, the acceptance of the fact that the loved object and the hated object are one and the same. One result of this process is that, as much as possible, one's relationship to one's internal objects corresponds more accurately to the actually existing external objects—parents or other primary caregivers—that are the basis for one's internalized introjections.¹⁵ Klein's point in this context is that the superego is frequently much more cruel and aggressive than the parental figures on which it's based,¹⁶ and that this disconnect between the excessively sadistic internalized objects and the actual objects on which they are based is also something to be worked through in the depressive position, with the aim of bringing one's internal and external objects more closely into alignment.

MR: That was extremely helpful. I'm intrigued by the idea that, for Klein, there might be something "beyond" the depressive position—even if this simply means that there must be a continuous working through of this position—because, you're right, critics usually stop at this position, as if reaching it meant that the task of becoming a viable subject had been accomplished. My hunch is that if there's a beyond of the depressive position, it might have something to do with creativity because working through is always a matter of creativity. And what you said about the capacity to tolerate anxiety and ambivalence also seems relevant to the idea that the depressive position might need to be continuously worked through.

Beyond this specific point, my initial impression is that so much of what you said about Klein makes sense from a Lacanian perspective that these two thinkers might not be as antithetical to each other as critics tend to presume. The notion of the psychotic core of the psyche

seems extremely Lacanian, as does the primacy of the death drive and aggression, and even the idea that there's a relationship to the object from the very beginning. This last idea—that there's a relationship to the object from the onset of life—isn't something that most Lacanians place emphasis on, but I think that this relationship exists.

I'll return to this theme later. At this point I want to ask you about the idea that you glean from Klein that in adult subjects there's the possibility of reverting to the paranoid-schizoid or the depressive position. Does this mean—and here I'm trying to translate your statement into crudely concrete terms—that a person who is depressed, say, when she is thirty-five, is in some ways reliving the depressive position? Is adult depression a repetition of the depressive position?

AA: Yes, I think that's right. The idea is that any loss that we experience later in life is experienced as a loss only insofar as it reactivates the experience of loss in the depressive position. I also think that Klein's work poses a very real question about whether and to what extent we ever get out of the depressive position, and even about whether we should want to—which is of course just another way of posing the question of the beyond.

MR: That makes perfect sense. And again, it accords well with Lacan, who argues that every adult loss reactivates the originary loss—the loss of *das Ding* (the Thing)—experienced during language acquisition, which for Lacan is a significant part of subject formation. The obvious difference is that Klein's depressive position predates the Lacanian process of being wounded by language (the “loss” of the Thing).

AA: Right. For Klein, it's only to the extent that an adult loss reactivates a primary loss—which in turn is a function of the fact that the object that we have lost has in some way reactivated some aspect of our relationship to the primary object—that it's experienced as a loss in the first place and therefore as something that needs to be worked through. I think you could definitely make connections here to Lacan's account of *das Ding*.

MR: Yes. You lose *das Ding*—or more precisely, you fantasize about having lost *das Ding*—and then every subsequent loss is

in some ways a repetition of that primary loss, which means that you're working through that loss with every additional loss you experience. I would in fact go as far as to say that the Lacanian subject is intrinsically melancholic, because it's born from a loss that can never be redeemed for the simple reason that it only exists as a retroactive fantasy. This points to the possibility that subjectivity is a matter of constantly working through melancholia, which doesn't seem very different from positing that being a subject is a matter of a continuous working through of the depressive position.

AA: That's great. But what might drive a wedge between Klein and Lacan are their divergent attitudes toward the ego. Lacan is extremely critical of Klein's position on the ego, and much of that disagreement appears to stem from the fact that Klein maintains that the aim of analysis is to integrate and strengthen the ego. For example, she describes the goal of analysis as follows:

In analysis we should make our way slowly and gradually towards the painful insight into the divisions in the patient's self. This means that the destructive sides are again and again split off and regained, until greater integration comes about. As a result, the feeling of responsibility becomes stronger, and guilt and depression are more fully experienced. When this happens, the ego is strengthened, omnipotence of destructive impulses is diminished ... and the capacity for love and gratitude, stifled in the course of splitting processes, is released. ... By helping the patient to achieve a better integration of his self, [analysis] aims at a mitigation of hatred by love.¹⁷

MR: It's true that the last thing Lacan wants is an integrated ego. But the quotation you just read implies that what Klein understands by ego integration is so complicated that it might bypass at least some of Lacan's qualms. Lacan despises the notion of strengthening the ego. But I don't get the sense from Klein's statement that strengthening the ego is, for her, a straightforward procedure. Can you explain the matter more fully?

AA: You're right that it's important to keep in mind what Klein does and does not mean when she talks about strengthening the ego.