

Thinking About Children, by D. Winnicott

a. Quotes:

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b. General Notes:

- Preface (pg. xv)
 - "For Winnicott, facts were the reality" (pg. xv)
 - "Winnicott held that the innate potential for growth in a baby and he was aware of the damage to innate potential, or the restrictions of potential in the baby, too) expressed itself in spontaneous gestures. If the mother responds appropriately to these gestures, the quality of adaptation provides a growing nucleus of experience in the baby, which results in a sense of wholeness, strength, and confidence that he calls the "true self". The growing strength of the "true self" enables the infant to cope with more frustration and relative failure on the part of the mother, without loss of liveliness. If a mother is unable to meet her baby's gestures appropriately, the baby develops a capacity to adapt to and comply with the mother's "impingements"- that is, with the mother's initiatives and demands-and the baby's spontaneity is gradually lost. Winnicott called such a defensive development the "false self". The greater the "mis-fit" between mother and baby, the greater the distortion and stunting of the baby's personality. Stressing that the decisive phase in the infant's development is the achievement of a unitary self capable of objectivity and creative activity, Winnicott described transitional stages between initial subjectivity and growing objectivity in the infant based on the development of the self through the growing capacity for symbolization and cultural experience." (pg. xvi)
- Introduction (pg. xix)
 - See text
- Chapter 1 - Toward and Objective Study of Human Nature (pg. 3)
 - "True intuition can reach to a whole truth in a flash (just as faulty intuition can reach to error), whereas in a science the whole truth is never reached. What is important in science is a construction of a satisfactory road towards the truth. That is why a scientific training is so important for everybody; it enables you and me to test our own little bits of the world satisfactorily. Our feelings and our imaginings may get out of hand and may take us anywhere, this moment enabling us to dream we are able to fly and the next moment allowing us to feel infinitely unsupported, so that we fall and fall, and there is no bottom, except waking, which means a return to science, to the well-tested and welcome external reality." (pg. 5)
 - "You and I started as scientists when we were very young, in fact as soon as we were born. We started life as scientists provided we had good-enough mothering in the very early stages, so that we did not get pushed into a muddle. We were then at the mercy of our imaginings, and, as soon as we could perceive external reality, every real thing happening to us was welcome as depending on something external to ourselves, and therefore dependable, because of being something we could get to know. Even things that made us angry, like being kept waiting when we were hungry, had a value for us. External reality helped us to stand the magic quality of our ideas, which at that time were very primitive because we had so little experience of real things, and so we had nothing to dream about, only (one might say) feelings to feel. These magical primitive feelings can be indeed very alarming as well as wonderful, as we see from the study of those people who have not succeeded in coming to terms with them, and who are insane. Many people develop a scientific interest in external reality to get away from the intuitive and the subjective approach to life. I suppose Western culture, on the whole, tends towards an exclusion of feelings by scientific thinking, whereas in Eastern culture the scientific method is relatively despised. In the best of our Western culture we enjoy a scientific method of approach to external reality- whilst at the same time we preserve in music, painting, and poetry, and in religion, the recognition of the importance of the creative and intuitive approach to life, as well as the magic of primitive feeling and spontaneous instinctual expression." (pg. 6-7)
- Chapter 2 - "Yes, but how do we know it's true?" (pg. 13)
 - "Whereas most types of teaching take you out of yourself, psychology, the psychology that matters, tends to throw you back into yourself. For we are all human beings ourselves, and if we learn about another we learn about ourselves. We can try to be objective and we can make every effort to learn about people without developing morbid introspection, but this requires effort, and you notice this effort, and you feel disturbed; this psychology is not going to behave itself properly as the other subjects in the curriculum do." (pg. 14)
- Chapter 3 - Primary introduction to external reality: the early stages (pg. 21)
 - "Let us simplify the matter of primitive development and say there are three things which can be separated out. One is making contact with reality. Another is feeling that you live in your body, and the other is the integration of the personality. These things overlap, but give us tags to hang on to. Let us take the integration of the personality. I have spoken to you about the stage being arrived at at which a child can make a circle and say this is a person and mother is another person, a similar one. He can begin to know the inside world and the outside world and that there is something at the edge and this is himself. This line between inner and outer can also be very weak and hardly discernible, and at the beginning one could say there are all sorts of different things which Glover calls "ego nuclei": all sorts of things which the child can use "I" about and it is only a little bit of "I" such as a toe seen, a finger moving, a hungry impulse, or the feeling of warmth from a hot-water bottle. This includes anything that impinges on the child and that the child is aware of, not at first separated out externally from the self, but only very gradually becoming separate. All these bits and pieces go to make the human being. How important it is at such a stage that the mother has the child in her mind as a whole person, because the child can then afford to be in pieces. No doubt, sometimes when babies are very hungry, all out in an attack, they come together and flow into something which becomes almost like a whole. Or, if they are very angry, things gather up into the anger and no doubt the bits come together. In the quiet moments there is no line between inner or outer but just lots of things separated out, sky seen through trees, something to do with mother's eyes all going in and out, wandering around. There is a lack of any need for integration. This is an extremely valuable thing to be able to retain: we miss something without it. It has something to do with being calm, restful, relaxed, and feeling one with people and things when no excitement is around. For the world to flow in and out without hungry taking and angry giving, infants need very satisfactory management at the beginning and then they are able to manage this as well as the actually more exciting experiences. On the other hand, some children have not managed this, such as the patient I was telling you about. The aggressive attack was kept separate and developed into an organized beating fantasy. On the other hand, those who have a wonderful life built up on a quiet basis can identify with nature and people in a quiet way. The integration of the personality is something which becomes an achievement through two sets of things. One is the times of keen feeling of one kind or another which makes the infant gather together and become one person, angry or hungry. The other is the management of the child. I try to think of it as what the mother does when she picks up her baby. She does not take him by the toe. She may make a little noise to give him time, folds him round, and somehow gathers him together. She does not assume he is an acrobat. She shows that she knows what is going on." (pg. 24-25)
- Chapter 4 - Environmental needs; the early stages; total dependence and essential independence (pg. 29)
 - See text
- Chapter 5 - The bearing of emotional development on feeding problems (pg. 39)
 - "to be a mother or to be maternal (am to include the man), there has to be a high degree of identification with the infant although of course the mother retains her adult status while making this identification." (pg. 41)

- Chapter 6 - Sleep refusal in children (pg. 42)
 - See text
- Chapter 7 - The effect of loss on the young (pg. 46)
 - "Our feelings are so much a part of us, and yet when it comes to the feelings of others we easily clock off, and pretend that all is well. It is difficult enough with positive feelings of love and trust, and we are shy to assert our beliefs. When the feelings are negative, or associated with hate and fear and suspicion, we are careful, and tend to deny what we really know is true. Worst is the tendency we can find in ourselves to deny the fact of sadness or grief in others, to pretend to ourselves that things are all right really. Perhaps we can be forgiven. We carry round with us, each one of us to some degree, much sadness and confusion and even hopelessness, and we can only manage to get up in the morning and do our work on the basis of putting serious things aside. So when we meet someone else's grief we soon come to the end of a phase of morbid collusion, and then we feel all right and expect the other person to feel all right too." (pg. 46)
- Chapter 8 - Out of the mouths of adolescents (pg. 48)
 - See text
- Chapter 9 - The delinquent and habitual offender (pg. 51)
 - "...clinical material observed over a space of twenty years has led me to believe that anti-social illness is more an illness of normal children disturbed by environment whereas (for instance) manic-depressive illness is more an internal illness of children that is unrelated aetiologically to gross environmental events." (pg. 52)
- Chapter 10 - A clinical approach to family problems (pg. 54)
 - "The family is a localized element in a society, an element that is orientated to the task of dealing with the arrival of a new individual. The nature of the family naturally varies with the pattern of the society. At one extreme we think of father and mother and child, and at the other we remember the families described in anthropological writings in which the actual parents are so integrated into the society structure that it looks as if aunts and uncles and grandparents and perhaps priests are more important than the actual father and mother. Behind the idea of the family is a recognition of the individual small child's initial need of a simplified version of society, one which can be used for the purposes of essential emotional growth, until development brings about in the child a capacity for using a wider circle, and indeed an ever-widening circle. Maturity can be described as the growth of the individual in relation to society appropriate to the age of the child, and resulting eventually in the individual's capacity to identify with society without too great a sacrifice of individual impulse. Naturally, maturity does not lead us all to world citizenship. Perhaps we always have a few Gilbert Murrays in our midst, some unrecognized, but, on the whole, we accept as mature the capacity of an individual to identify (without loss of personal identity) with a sub-group—a nation, a race, a political party, an ideology, a religion, or a persecuted minority. We do not expect maturity in these terms till the individual has passed through adolescence and has begun to think in terms of establishing a family, with of course the co-operation of a partner." (pg. 54-55)
- Chapter 11 - Mental hygiene of the pre-school child (pg. 59)
 - "There are many ways of viewing human nature, and by one of them we see that people are concerned with an inner and an outer life. **The outer life is fairly obvious, though much of the motivation is obscure, and is unconscious, even deeply buried. The inner life is mostly a matter of the unconscious.** There is an interplay between this inner and outer life in healthy people, so that the external world is enriched for us by our own inner world which we can readily park out on to people and things that we come in contact with; also, our inner world is modified by our contact with the externally real, so that, as time goes on, we come to be surer of ourselves in the sense of being more clear as to the distinction between the two realities. It is in infancy and at the pre-school age that this chiefly happens, though it never ceases throughout life, and psychoanalysis is a technique by which we can enable this process to come nearer to completion than occurs in the ordinary course of development. You might say that in the course of emotional development we become less superstitious - for **in superstition we have no confidence in external reality since it becomes so readily invested with feelings that belong to our inner life.** One alternative to frank superstition is for us to develop, as we all do, a control of our inner people, of their feelings and activities, and this affects our self-control in our outer relationships. We do to some extent what Joan, whom I described earlier, did excessively. An excess of control is dangerous, since it slows down, as we feel it, our vital forces and makes us feel depressed, and all that sort of thing; so we seek alternatives, and one is to place the things we consider bad in ourselves out of ourselves on to objects or people in the external world, and to fight and control them there. A homely example of this is to be seen in Germany today [1936] where the expulsion and maltreatment of the Jews is, at its best, an attempt on the part of the so-called Aryan to get something he doesn't like out of himself—he tries to see it in the Jews, imagines he has succeeded, and then feels justified in persecuting them and feels better after having persecuted them. At one time, psychoanalysis was felt to epitomize all that is worst in human nature. People saw in it all their own badnesses which they hated to own, and they felt righteous in denouncing it. A lady I know and respect got up in a drawing-room meeting and said that psychoanalysis of children was something that ought to be stopped by law, and she felt it was worse than child murder and child seduction. I found her view rather sickening, since I was training to be an analyst of children myself. The reality has turned out to be unrelated to this good lady's fantasies about it" (Pg. 72-73)
- Chapter 12 - The teacher, the parent, and the doctor (pg. 77)
 - See text
- Chapter 13 - A clinical example of symptomatology following the birth of a sibling (pg. 97)
 - See text
- Chapter 14 - Notes on a little boy (pg. 102)
 - See text
- Chapter 15 - The niffle (pg. 104)
 - See text
- Chapter 16 - Two adopted children (pg. 113)
 - See text
- Chapter 17 - Pitfalls of adoption (pg. 128)
 - "A child needs to be loved, and there are reasons for this which can be put down in black and white. It is not that a human being can be made by the environment or by good nurture, and even by the loving care of parents, but that loving care is necessary for the innate processes of emotional growth." (pg. 130)
- Chapter 18 - Adopted children in adolescence (pg. 136)
 - See text
- Chapter 19 - Contribution to a discussion on enuresis (pg. 151)
 - See text
- Chapter 20 - Papular uricaria and the dynamics of skin sensation (pg. 157)
 - See text
- Chapter 21 - Short communication on enuresis (pg. 171)
 - See text
- Chapter 22 - Child psychiatry (pg. 176)

- See text
 - Chapter 23 - On cardia neurosis in children (pg. 179)
 - See text
 - Chapter 24 - Three reviews of books on autism (pg. 191)
 - See text
 - Chapter 25 - Autism (pg. 197)
 - "When parents are doing all the minute things of infant care, and this often includes doing nothing at all except being alongside, then in terms of the infant's personal development a great deal is happening. The foundation is being laid for many things, some of which can be enumerated. I choose to enumerate, firstly, the whole process of integration which leads eventually to the baby's becoming autonomous; secondly, the baby's ability to come to terms with his own body, leading eventually to psychosomatic coexistence which includes firm muscle tone; and, thirdly, the baby's initial steps in object-relating, which lead to the ability to adopt symbolic objects and to the existence of an area in between the baby and persons in which play is meaningful. All these things belong to the maturational process which the baby inherits, but nothing in the development of a baby can take place without something from a human being which meets the baby almost exactly in the way that is needed. One of the most difficult of all these, unless it happens naturally, is simply coexistence: two people breathing together and doing nothing simply because doing is not a state of rest. I am aware that to some this idea comes easily, but to others it appears mystical and disturbingly complex. It is this sort of thing that we do find, however, when we examine these intimate matters with the microscope, so to speak, and we have to state them in so far as we are able to find words to describe what we mean." (pg. 216-217)
 - Chapter 26 - The aetiology of infantile schizophrenia in terms of adaptive failure (pg. 218)
 - See text
 - Chapter 27 - Training for child psychiatry (pg. 227)
 - See text
 - Chapter 28 - Note on the time factor in treatment (pg. 231)
 - See text
 - Chapter 29 - The association for child psychology (pg. 235)
 - See text
 - Chapter 30 - A link between paediatrics and child psychology (pg. 255)
 - See text
 - Chapter 31 - Child psychiatry, social work, and alternative care (pg. 277)
 - See text
- c. Further Readings:
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