Kant: investigator of the mind and the first epistemologist

When he wished to draw particular attention to the problem of the mind, the psychoanalyst Bion would often invite his readers to delve into the philosophical thought of Kant.

Because we cannot but say to ourselves Kant’s children.

ABSTRACT: There are several reasons why present-day psychoanalysts should be interested in Kant’s thinking. In the first place, Kant is considered to have given rise to modern epistemology. He was the first to investigate the conditions of possibility of science which is why his thinking is considered to be at the core of modern philosophy. Kant’s solution has been the starting point for all subsequent epistemological research, both in the natural sciences and human sciences. It has enabled present-day psychoanalysis to reflect on its own referent, operational procedures, and fundamental predicates.

The second reason is that Kant’s philosophy allows an investigation of the meaning of conscious and unconscious mental activity, of protomental structures, of the organization of the inner world, of the intrapsychic and intersubjective dimension of the mind, and of the mechanisms of splitting, projective and introjective identification, denial and idealisation, viewed as other categories of the intellect. The “Copernican revolution” of Kant’s philosophy consisted of a shift in emphasis from knowing things to our way of knowing things. We know objects only as they appear, as phenomena (transcendental idealism), and through a priori categories of our mind.

Kant’s anthropology has been incorporated into the psychoanalytic anthropology of Bion, Money-Kyrle, Meltzer, Resnik, and others (Mancia & Longhin, 2000). However, his concepts requires completion, in the sense that the affective and emotional component can also be considered part of the “protomental” and belongs to the a priori categories. (It should be pointed out that Kant’s concept of things-

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in-themselves, or noumena, should not be identified with the unconscious.) The mental phenomena which belong to severe psychopathologies and appear to rule out affective and emotional components, as, for example, autism and some forms of psychosis, can be viewed as the effect of an early relational failure. Kant’s thinking is of great relevance from the point of view of art as well. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant states that aesthetic judgments are based on feeling. Feeling is a third category, next to intellect and reason. Kant also carried out a revolution in the field of aesthetics by claiming that beauty is not an *objective* quality of objects but the result of their *encounter* with our mind, in other words something which emerges in the mind. Although based on feelings, aesthetic judgments claim universal validity, just like cognitive judgments.

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THE REASON WHY PRESENT-DAY PSYCHOANALYSIS IS INTERESTED IN KANT’S PHILOSOPHY

The first reason why present-day psychoanalysis is interested in Kant’s philosophy is that it offers valuable insights into the meaning of conscious and unconscious mental life, protomental structures, and the organisation of the inner world. The second reason has to do with the reflections on the process of internalisation, begun by Kant and which have been continued by present-day psychoanalysis with the theory of the *internal world*, the intrapsychic and intersubjective dimension of the mind, the mechanisms of splitting, projective and introjective identification, and denial and idealisation, as additional categories of the intellect.

Another reason for this interest is that Kant’s anthropology is integrated into the psychoanalytic anthropology of Bion (1962), Money-Kyrle (1978), Meltzer (1978), Resnik (1992), and others. Finally, Kant is considered to have given rise to modern epistemology. He was the first to investigate the *conditions of possibility of science* which is why his thinking is considered to be at the core of modern philosophy. Kant’s solution is the starting point for all subsequent epistemological research, in the natural sciences as well as the human sciences, and hence psychoanalysis. This is what enables present-day psychoanalysis to reflect on its own epistemological status; its own referent, operational procedures and fundamental predicates.

The “Copernican revolution” of Kant’s philosophy consists of a shift in emphasis from enquiring into things to enquiring into our mode of knowing them. The significance of this shift is that it implied that the objects of experience were determined by the transcendental functions of the mind, seen as the set of *a priori elements*. For example, space and time, as pure intuitions, or