

# BOOK REVIEWS

**Tustin Frances (1981). *Autistic states in children.***  
Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd. London, pp. 276. Hard cover. R27,05.

Frances Tustin has had 30 years of experience as a child psychotherapist. In this book she attempts to explain autism from the child's point of view and succeeds in giving the reader a greater understanding of what the child experiences. The book consists of three parts: normal autism and the autism of childhood psychoses; psychodynamics, and the treatment of pathological and clinical cases.

The author starts with normal primary autism where maternal preoccupation with the child initially protects him from not-self experiences. This serves as a transition stage from life in the womb. At this stage there is "no recognition of objects as separate from the flux of sensations which constitute the infant's sense of being." He experiences bodily rhythms in contact with his mother as a global awareness (breastfeeding is an important part of this). Only as he develops an awareness of not-self does he develop a sense of self and separate identity.

Gradually the child learns that the not-self mother does not satisfy him completely and immediately. This brings frustration and the child uses transitional activities to ease him over this time. He becomes more ready to experience his mother as separate from him. Through this process bonding

has developed between mother and child, and he can now tolerate being separate from her. If for any of a large number of reasons primary autism is disturbed and the infant reacts by developing pathological autism, bonding is disturbed. Automatic reactions block out awareness of the not-self mother, since this awareness is intolerable to him. Autosensual activities are intensified to preserve the fusion or confused fusion with his mother.

Tustin describes two types of pathological reaction: negation and confusion. Negation leads to encapsulation. Encapsulation can be global as in the shell-type child who seems to be in a shell, dormant, as if waiting for more favourable conditions to start his development. There can also be encapsulation of segments, for instance some of the child's perceptions seem to be encapsulated. Threatening not-self objects are broken up into segments until they can be brought together in a more tolerable way. Encapsulations and childhood autistics are virtually the same.

Confusion leads to confusional autistic states of which childhood schizophrenia is one example. Treatment of these children is more difficult since there is a pathological entanglement with the not-self. Self and not-self are inextricably confused. Tustin uses many examples of children and their treatment to demonstrate her theories.