SUSAN ISAACS

A Life Freeing the Minds of Children

PHILIP GRAHAM

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14. Postscript

The twenty-first century has seen much confirmation of Susan Isaacs's position as an important influence both in child-centred education and in psychoanalysis. In addition, there have also been a number of claims for her role in fields in which she had not previously been thought to have contributed.

Susan Isaacs and Child-Centred Education

Susan Isaacs's influence on infant and primary school education from the 1940s to the 1970s has been described in Chapter 13. She was, as we saw, by no means the first to advocate child-centred education, having been preceded by, among others, Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel. However, the inclusion of her writings in the curriculum of British teachers-in-training from the 1940s to the 1960s meant that she had considerable impact specifically in the promotion of learning through play and discovery, individual learning, flexibility of the curriculum to meet the needs of the individual child and the use of the natural environment. The publication in 1967 of the influential Plowden Report which endorsed these principles, gave a further impetus to her ideas.

During the twenty-first century, since and shortly before the publication of the first edition of this book, a number of appreciative reviews of Isaacs work, endorsing her importance as a pioneer in progressive education in the early years, have appeared. Jody Hall (2000), for example, sees Isaacs as having formulated the following principles regarded from the 1960s as basic to science learning:

1. Children learn from physical contact with the world. Children's testing and measuring of reality weans them from personal schemas.

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2. Children's knowledge increases through experiences of experiment, observation and discovery. For example, after burning bits of wool and cotton, a Malting House School child observed that wool does not burn so easily as cotton.
3. Children have strong, spontaneous interests in and raise questions about the objects and events of the natural world:

Later, Hall (2002) placed Isaacs as one of the main influences on progressive education in both England and the United States (Hall, 2002). Willan (2009) praised Isaacs for her clarity of expression which she deemed superior and much preferred by students to that of Jean Piaget, the main influence on British educators in the second half of the twentieth century. Willan credits Isaacs with having introduced Piaget to British educators though she does not mention the significant divergence in their views in relation to the relative importance of chronological age and experience in children's level of ability (see Chapter 7). She regards the system of recording observations of children developed by Isaacs as superior to that then recently introduced in the early 2000s as the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile. Isaacs's record she sees as more useful as a basis for 'planning for individual learning'. In a later publication, Willan (2011) again reviews Isaacs's range of interests and activities.

A recent re-examination by Laura Tisdall (2017) of the influence of Susan Isaacs and of psychoanalytic thought between 1945 and 1979 more generally has revealed that the views of both parents and teachers on appropriate methods of child upbringing were more complex than has hitherto been appreciated. Child-rearing manuals, increasingly consulted by parents as authoritative sources of advice, emphasised the need for parents to take into account the wishes and desires of their children as well as their individual personalities. But teachers, following a Piagetian model of developmental stages were more inclined to frame the curriculum in the light of the cognitive level children of particular ages had reached or were supposed to have reached. Tisdall regards it as important to consider both home and school when considering how children were perceived at this time. She writes that 'both teachers and parents felt increased pressure to treat children as individuals, unable to rely any longer solely on traditional or craft knowledge, and both felt that the strictures of progressivism made their roles more demanding.'

She concludes (ibid. p. 45): 'Both parents and teachers became anxious about the impact of child-centred methods upon children themselves, making them more self-centred. When teachers became parents themselves and appreciated the demands child-centred parenting put on them, they often returned to teaching having become increasingly resistant to child-centred methods.'

Elizabeth Wood (2007) has considered the way child-centred education has been conceptualised since the publication of the Plowden Report. This Report gave a strong impetus to the need for education in the pre-school years and the number of children in the 0–5 age group receiving formal education has gradually increased since that time. The introduction of the SureStart programme in 1999 gave a particularly strong message in this direction. Although in recent years, many of the SureStart initiatives have been closed down as a result of financial pressures, their place has often been taken by so-called Children's Centres providing similar educational input. The educational value of play qua play has, however, been increasingly questioned. The pre-school curriculum, in line with the curriculum at all levels of schooling, has been subject to increasingly prescriptive intervention by successive governments of both main parties, beginning with curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage at ages 3 to 5 (2000). The Foundation Phase curriculum, introduced in 2008, was designed to provide all 3–7-year-olds with a developmental, experiential, play-based approach to learning.

Other studies have examined the effect of child-centred education on different groups of children. In particular, Sally Power and her colleagues (2018) have looked at how it benefits some groups more than others. There is both a gender and a class difference with girls and socio-economically advantaged groups benefiting more than boys and the disadvantaged. It is also likely that children from certain ethnic minority groups where patterns of parenting are more authoritarian, are less likely to benefit from child-centred educational approaches as a result of a conflict of values. There is evidence that more active young children, not just those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) benefit more from a structured classroom approach (Reid, 1999).

As one of the early advocates of child-centred learning, Susan Isaacs continues to exert an influence on the education of young children as well as the values of early child educators. Murray (2021) has recently argued that her 'work with particular focus on 'discovery, reasoning and thought', her values and three key disciplines that informed her practice and research: pedagogy, philosophy and psychology' maintain their relevance to this day and that her ideas have the 'potential to benefit the field now and into the future'.

The Malting House School: New Perspectives

The story of the establishment and subsequent life of the Malting House School in Cambridge is described in Chapters Five and Six. Since this book's publication, further material has come to light, especially from a rich source of material held by the Pyke family. While many of Geoffrey Pyke's ideas about the educational philosophy and design of the school are covered in the existing chapters, examination of the Pyke papers has provided new material.

It will be recalled that, before the school was established, there were numerous lively discussions between Susan and Nathan Isaacs and Geoffrey Pyke during which the school's philosophy was hammered out among the three main protagonists. While the personalities and ideas of Nathan and Susan are already fully described, the new material provides additional insights into Geoffrey's thinking (Forrester and Cameron, 2011). Pyke's primary aim for the school was the creation of outstanding scientists. In his view, the main threat to the achievement of this aim was the Oedipus situation described by Freud as applicable to the rivalry between sons and their fathers. He believed that the (largely) unconscious murderous fantasies that boys entertained about their fathers led them to conflict not only with their fathers but, through displacement, to all authority figures. This meant, as Pyke saw it, that they were unable to accept that their teachers were more knowledgeable than they were. It is notable that Freud saw the Oedipus complex acting at its most intense at the ages of four to six. As we have seen, Pyke's father, Lionel, died suddenly and unexpectedly when Geoffrey was five years old. Pyke's psychoanalysis with James Glover would certainly have involved discussion of this traumatic event in his life. (It has to be

said that if the oedipal situation was an inhibiting influence on science education, one might expect girls to outstrip boys in this subject. Clearly, at the time Pyke was writing as well as for many years subsequently, this was far from the case).

Pyke hoped that new educational techniques would overcome the Oedipal threat by tackling the powerful emotions that inevitably complicated the relationships between the generations. In particular, teachers would not elicit negative emotions in the children they taught because they would use methods that would take as their starting point the questions the children asked. There would inevitably be considerable expression of hatred and aggression in the school; this would be accepted as natural and not punished but treated as normal and understandable (Cameron, 2006).

Pyke's views on this matter, derived largely from Freudian psychoanalysis resonated with the initial thoughts of Susan Isaacs which were inspired at least partly by Melanie Klein's views on the harmful effects of sexual repression and the need to allow children to express sexual feelings and ideas widely regarded as unacceptable. However, at the meeting of the Cambridge psychoanalysis discussion group held on 13 June 1925 and described in Chapter 6, reservations were expressed. This inter-disciplinary discussion group brought together many of the brightest minds in Cambridge from fields as disparate as medicine, philosophy and literary criticism (Forrester and Cameron, op cit.). Pyke had connections with this group; indeed Frank Ramsey (ibid., p. 440), the philosopher and an active member of the discussion group, was godfather to Pyke's son, David. The meeting was held in the house of Arthur Tansley, one of the founders of ecological science, who was a central member of the psychoanalysis discussion group.

The new material reveals that, after Susan Isaacs had described the philosophy and pedagogic practice of the Malting House School, the discussion revolved around the conditions necessary for productive creativity in the arts and sciences. It was claimed, in line with Tansley's interest in the influence of the environment, that people living in warmer climates were less creative than those living in temperate zones. This was explained by the fact that, liberated by the warmth of their climate, they were less sexually repressed. Consequently, they did not experience the effects of 'sublimation', the displacement of libidinal energy into

creative activity, that Freud claimed resulted from the effects of sexual repression. John Rickman, the psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, who was present at the meeting, later recalled that it was questioned whether the freedom in the school 'might not have some of the quality of a pre-genital brothel and so hinder the cultural gains which are bought at the cost of erotic deprivation' (Rickman, 1950). According to Rickman, this view made a distinct impression on Susan Isaacs and forced her to reconsider her views. The problem remained 'stuck, barbed like a fish-hook, in her memory.' (ibid.)

In his review of the influence of psychoanalysis on education and pedagogy, Mathew Thomson (2006, p. 130) cites Susan Isaacs as opposed to too much freedom of expression of children's feelings. Ironically, given the basic philosophy of the school relating to the benefits of free movement and expression, he quotes her as viewing children as needing 'a sense of order' (ibid.). He also cites her as regarding it as important for there to be a clear distinction between the role of analyst and that of teacher. She saw emotional transference as incompatible with the teacher-pupil relationship (ibid.). These views, so contrary to those of Geoffrey Pyke, were expressed in *The Social Development of Young Children* (Isaacs, 1933), which was written well after the school closed.

Following the Cambridge psychoanalysis discussion group meeting, disagreements between Geoffrey and Susan on the question of the role of parents in child upbringing became more overt. While Geoffrey, who never spoke to his mother and whose father had died many years previously, regarded children as better off separated from their parents, Susan took a much more nuanced view of parental influence. Her analysis with JC Flugel had brought up anxieties to do with separation, doubtless triggered by recall of the effects of the death of her mother when she was six years old (Forrester and Cameron, p. 446). In a lecture about the school given later to the British Psychoanalytic Society, while crediting Geoffrey with much of the philosophy underlying the methods used in the school, she now claimed that the apparent freedom of the children was 'psychologically worthless since any parent figure is of necessity a powerful psychological factor.' Children, she thought, were not isolated creatures but social animals who needed to be understood in ecological terms. Parents could act as both positive and negative influences on their children's development (Forrester and Cameron 2011, p. 468).

Finally, the new material appearing since the first publication of this book has revealed the subsequent careers of an additional number of children who had attended the Malting House School (Forrester and Cameron, 2011, pp. 458–59). Of course, the children had only attended the school for a relatively brief period when they were very young, so one cannot ascribe any later achievements to the effect of the school's ethos. However, it is of interest that one of the sons of GE Moore, the philosopher, became a poet and the other a music teacher. One of the sons of Gordon Carey, education secretary of Cambridge University, became a Church of England canon and the other a biographer. Susannah Foss became a child psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. David Pyke himself became a consultant in diabetic medicine. The only distinguished scientist to emerge from the school was Peter Fowler, a physicist, but bearing in mind he was himself the son of a mathematical physicist and grandson of Lord Rutherford, one of the fathers of nuclear physics, it would be unwise to attribute his scientific prowess to the effects of his early schooling.

Susan Isaacs and Advice to Parents

As described in Chapter Nine, Susan Isaacs wrote extensively for a popular audience on child-care and the upbringing of children in the late 1920s and 1930s. Her book *The Nursery Years*, first published in 1929, remained in print until 1971 and sold well. Between 1929 and the mid-1930s, under the name Ursula Wise, she wrote a weekly column answering questions posed by mothers and nannies in the magazine, *Nursery World*. An article Susan Isaacs published in 1932 summarising the content of the questions is also described in Chapter Nine.

In her article titled 'Speaking Kleinian': Susan Isaacs as Ursula Wise and the Inter-War Popularisation of Psychoanalysis' (2017), Michal Shapira has revisited Susan Isaacs's writing for parents and nannies and its popularisation of psychoanalysis. As Graham Richards (2000) has shown, the influence of psychoanalysis expanded enormously in the inter-war period. Richards mentions Isaacs in the context of its permeating into advice on child rearing and education, but psychoanalysis extended its reach into virtually every aspect of academic and cultural life. As well as its entry into popular discourse it permeated the cinema, theatre,

religion and the press. Though there was resistance from academics in medicine and psychology, it made notable inroads into numerous other academic fields such as literary theory, philosophy, anthropology, economics, criminology and historiography (Forrester and Cameron, 2017). Further, even though there was much resistance to the incursion of psychoanalysis into medical practice from the medical establishment, this was more focused than is sometimes appreciated. For example, in the most widely used textbook of psychiatry, a highly positive view of the theoretical contributions of Freudian psychiatry was taken (Henderson and Gillespie, 1940, p. 516), even though its use as a therapeutic tool was regarded as potentially dangerous (ibid., p. 518). Indeed, the spread of psychoanalysis in the between war period can be compared to the way neuroscience from the 1980s to the present day has permeated many if not most fields of academic enquiry (see Tallis, 2011 for a discussion of what he calls neuromania). Thus Isaacs's psychoanalytic incursion into child-rearing has to be seen in the context of the wider popularisation of the subject. The ubiquity of psychoanalytic ideas, as perceived by D. H. Lawrence (1923, p. 82) has already been described. As we saw, Lawrence wrote '… psychoanalysis had become a public danger. The mob was on the alert. The Oedipus Complex was a household word…'

In her article, Shapira focuses almost exclusively on the influence that the writing of Melanie Klein had on Susan Isaacs's views on child upbringing. She claims that 'Isaacs taught British parents to 'speak Kleinian', translating Klein's intellectual ideas into ordinary language. In her Conclusion, she goes on to assert that 'her column became a powerful medium for effectively training lay audiences in the core tenets of Kleinian psychoanalysis.' Klein was indeed an important influence on Isaacs, but, as described in Chapter Nine, Isaacs's views on the topic were very significantly formed before Melanie Klein came on the scene. Her own traumatic childhood during which no one showed any interest in her feelings about the death of her mother and the abrupt ending of her education must surely have made her more aware of the need to listen to children. During her time in 1911–1912 as Mistress of Method in the Infant Department of Darlington Training College (see Chapter Three), she was already aware of the need to stimulate the creativity of young children. Further, before she began to write for parents, Isaacs had had two periods of personal psychanalytic experience with Freudian analysts, Otto Rank and John Flugel (see Chapter Four).

So, by the time Melanie Klein first published on the importance of sexual instruction of young children in 1921, (see Chapter Five) Isaacs had already formulated many of her own ideas. Shapira (p. 546) recognises influences other than Klein on Isaacs, but might perhaps have expanded on their importance to her. Further, while certainly Klein advocated a humane, child-centred approach to child-rearing with acknowledgement of the importance of unconscious fantasies, there is really nothing specifically Kleinian about these ideas. They were later popularised by Benjamin Spock (see below) whose psychoanalytic training was Freudian. Unsurprisingly, because of their highly technical nature, more specifically Kleinian ideas, such as the concepts of the paranoid/schizoid and depressive 'positions' have no place in the content of Isaacs's advice to parents.

Shapira echoes the discussion in Chapter Nine of the strongly critical view Isaacs took of her main competitor in the field of writing for parents: the behaviourist, John Watson (see Chapter Nine). Shapira possibly understates the strength of professional and lay opinion on the superiority of behaviourist theory. Hardyment (1995) in her discussion of child-rearing manuals in the inter-war period titles one section 'Behaviourism Triumphant' and, though she discusses Isaacs's publications in some detail, clearly sees them as having less impact at this time than those of her chief competitor. On the other hand, Thomson (2006, p. 135) claims that Hardyment exaggerates the importance of behaviourist thinking in Britain for which he found little evidence. It should be added that Watson was not Susan Isaacs's only rival. The New Zealand doctor and veterinary specialist, M. Truby King, was also widely read, especially by those looking for advice on how to manage problems in the first two years of life. Truby King recommended absolute regularity of mealtimes regardless of the needs of the baby. 'Give nothing whatever but water and fruit juice between meals', he wrote (King, 1934, p. 150). It was really not until the late 1940s when the child-rearing manual of the American psychoanalytically-orientated paediatrician, Benjamin Spock, was first published that psychoanalytic theories finally achieved superiority over behaviourist approaches in this field (see Chapter Thirteen).

This is not to deny that Klein was an important source of ideas for Isaacs. (Indeed, this is acknowledged in Chapter Nine). This influence is

particularly apparent in Isaacs's insistence on the normality of aggressive feelings and behaviour in the young child and in the importance she gives to unconscious fantasies in helping us to understand why children behave in the ways they do. Even here, however, it must not be forgotten that these ideas were not specific to Klein but were current in classical psychoanalysis. Sometimes Shapira seems to forget the ubiquitous nature of the ideas Isaacs was proposing. For example, she writes at one point: 'In typical Kleinian form, Isaacs advised against scolding, as increased anxiety would only lessen the child's control. She advised the caregiver to ensure the child knew that she did not think badly of him.' (p. 539). The idea that telling a child off may reduce a child's self-esteem is surely in no way specifically Kleinian.

Susan Isaacs and the Treatment of Disturbed Children

In considering the legacy of Susan Isaacs in Chapter 13, her contribution to understanding of children with psychological and psychiatric disorders is not discussed. In fact, although she treated a number of children in private practice using psychoanalytic methods, Susan Isaacs contributions in this field arose from her pedagogy and were not specifically directed towards the psychological treatment of children with behaviour and emotional problems. Although it is clear (see Chapter Five) a high proportion of children admitted to the school had quite marked disturbance, as far as Isaacs is concerned, these problems were in no way a focus for change. She is however mentioned in a review of the development of child guidance services in Britain (Stewart, 2013), as someone who helped break down boundaries (p. 46), presumably between psychoanalysis and other child psychiatric and psychological disciplines.

As we saw in Chapter 12, the conflict in the psychoanalytic world between the followers of Anna Freud and those of Melanie Klein came to a head in 1943 with the meetings of the two groups known as the Controversial Discussions. Susan Isaacs, a committed follower of Melanie Klein took a leading part in these discussions which, largely, resulted in a victory for the Kleinians. They continued to run the Tavistock Clinic, with its major share of training and clinical resources. Isaacs however played little or no part in its clinical work or teaching there. Further,

as Stewart (ibid., p. 46) points out, psychoanalytic approaches were initially largely excluded from the practice of these newly developed clinics. These were administered by local education authorities and, outside of London, directed by educational psychologists. London child guidance clinics were however, directed by psychiatrists.

In contrast, especially but not only in London, there was a significant number of hospital-based clinics of child psychiatry which were much more favourable to psychoanalytic approaches. Indeed, during the 1950s and 1960s, in most of these clinics it was virtually a requirement of employment as a child psychiatrist either to have completed a psychoanalysis or to be in psychoanalytic training.

Although, as we saw in Chapter 8, in 1933 Susan Isaacs was regarded as having fulfilled all the requirements to be a fully trained child and adult psychoanalyst, she took no part in the establishment of child psychotherapy as an established discipline. The Association of Child Psychotherapists was not established until 1949, the year after her death and, although discussions leading to its establishment had started some years before this, Isaacs was by then too ill to take part in them. In the 1950s and 1960s, psychoanalytic child psychotherapists began to be employed both in child and family psychiatric clinics and in hospital departments of child psychiatry. There are at the time of writing, 900 members of the Association of Child Psychotherapists.

There is however one area in which Susan Isaacs continues to exert influence: psychoanalytic theory. The part she played in the 1943 so-called 'controversial discussions' held between the Vienna School supporters of Anna Freud and the largely British followers of Melanie Klein is fully discussed in Chapter 12. As described there, her views on the nature of 'phantasy' formed a central feature of the discussions. Her, and Melanie Klein's view, that phantasies were basic mental activities and not, as the Freudians believed, unconscious wishes blocked from fulfilment, was a major point of difference between the two schools. According to Elizabeth Spillius (2000) 'emphasis on the unconscious has remained characteristic of Kleinian analysis. Like Klein herself, her present-day followers take it for granted that in thinking, in dreaming, in creativity, in all experiencing, there is a constant and often uncomfortable mixture of logic and illogic. Further, unconscious phantasy is the mainspring of both creativity and destructiveness (ibid., p. 26). Thus, Isaacs's

and, of course, Klein's views on phantasy continued to hold sway in psychoanalytic thinking for at least fifty years after her death.

There is one important aspect of child psychotherapy in which there have been most significant developments since the publication of the first edition of this book was published in 2009. In Chapter Thirteen, I pointed to the lack of systematic evidence that child psychotherapy was of greater benefit than advice given by a kindly adult. Since 2009, there has been a steady stream of publications reporting on controlled trials of child psychotherapy. A number of meta-analyses of such studies have now appeared. Most recently, Midgley et al. (2021) have reviewed the results of large numbers of studies, some of high scientific quality, from which one can draw positive conclusions about the efficacy of such psychotherapy. The evidence base is not as solid as one might hope, but it is a great deal sounder than was the case until recently.

Children and War

In her book *The War Inside* (2013), Michal Shapira has argued for the importance of psychoanalysis in bringing to attention the psychological effects of the stress that war inflicts on individuals. She claims that while much has been written on the historical events in the Second World War, much less attention has been given to the turbulent emotions aroused by the conflict or what she calls 'the war within'. She quotes at some length from an article written by Susan Isaacs (1940) about the psychological effects of wartime evacuation on children. This article is largely based on her findings from the Cambridge Evacuation Survey described earlier in Chapter Eleven. The article is preceded by a Foreword written by John Rickman and followed by articles written by John Bowlby and Donald Winnicott, all psychoanalysts. While Bowlby's article, like that of Isaacs, is focussed on the experience of children, Winnicott mainly discusses the psychological impact of evacuation on mothers. These articles were largely recapitulated in a series published in the same journal in 1945 and discussed in Chapter Twelve.

The magazine in which these articles were written, *New Era in Home and School*, was published by the New Education Fellowship, an organisation that had been founded after the First World War to promote progressive ideas in education, especially those that recognised

children's individuality and the need to promote their imaginative and creative capacities. There is much in common between the articles written by Isaacs, Bowlby and Winnicott. Isaacs however had the advantage that she could speak from the access her survey had given her to the total population of evacuated children, while Bowlby and Winnicott's experience was limited to those referred to them because of emotional and behaviour problems. Consequently, in contrast to them, Isaacs could write about the positive aspects and benefits of evacuation. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter 11, she was able to report that most evacuated children were happy in their new homes and liked the schools to which they had been allocated. All the same a significant number were disturbed by their evacuation experience.

Whether or not they had developed disturbances as a result of evacuation, the overwhelming majority missed their parents, aunts and uncles and other members of their families. Isaacs noted that 'the fundamental relationships of life have been cut across suddenly…' Many evacuated children expressed openly or unconsciously a fear that their parents might be killed or leave them for ever. In the essays the children were asked to write about their experiences, many wrote most movingly about what they missed at home, taking the baby next door for a walk, being put to bed by their mothers, even being given a hiding by their fathers. All had some difficulties getting over the experience of the new and unfamiliar world into which they had been thrust. 'These people have never seen you, so they don't like you' one four-year-old was heard saying to another child. Home food was missed. In general, children preferred the 'bread and marge' they got at home to the healthier food they were fed in their new homes. As we saw in Chapter 11, problems were most notable when children had been placed in homes of different social class from their own. Although most evacuated children did learn to be at home and at ease with their new families, many didn't.

Between them, the contributors to the magazine were able to make a number of helpful suggestions for preventing stress reactions. If evacuation was necessary, mothers should be encouraged to stay with their young children and leave the danger areas themselves. Where attempts were made for mothers to share care outside danger areas with foster mothers, this was rarely successful. So, perhaps groups of evacuated mothers could take over large empty houses and live

semi-independently in them. Where it was impossible for mothers to leave their other responsibilities, there should be efforts to have young children looked after by relatives or other people with whom they were familiar. If that was impossible, then, despite the risks, it was probably better to leave very young children under four in the danger areas with their mothers.

It was important to ensure that, as far as possible, there was consistency in the care children received. Children should not be put in the care of a succession of foster mothers as was then sometimes the case but should be looked after by one caretaker. Further, little children should not be placed in large groups with multiple caretakers. Parental visits to children placed away from home should be strongly encouraged, even if children appeared distressed by them.

These observations on the psychology of evacuated children are at least as relevant today as they were when they were written. Worldwide, according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) there are around 37 million child refugees scattered throughout the world. There are apparently no data on the ages of these children, but a significant number are young. At the time of writing this postscript, the most recent refugee crisis has arisen as a result of the war in the Ukraine. Again, there are no data on the number or ages of unaccompanied children, but one has the impression that the lessons learned as a result of the work done during and after the Second World War have been taken on board by the various refugee agencies. Great efforts are made to ensure children, especially young children, are not separated from their parents, even if this means families staying in danger zones.

There is another aspect of Susan Isaacs's work that has been regarded as illuminating in relation to war that is not mentioned by Michal Shapira (2013) in her account of the impact of psychoanalysis on aspects of war. In their book *Personal Aggressiveness and War*, Evan Durbin, a politician and economist, and John Bowlby (1938, pp. 7–19) cite her work on the social development of children as a source, indeed the only source of information on the phenomenon of childhood aggression and its triggers, so key as they saw it, to understanding the aggressive impulses leading to armed conflict between nations. They emphasise her view of the importance of understanding that much aggression is unconsciously

motivated, is accompanied by profound love-hate ambivalence and is often triggered by jealous possessiveness (ibid., pp. 74–94).

Susan Isaacs and Maternalism

In his book *The Maternalists* (2021), Shaul Bar-Haim claims that between-wars and post-Second World War psychoanalysts, including Susan Isaacs through her influence on education, were key influences on the development of the British welfare state. According to Bar-Haim, psychoanalysis played a 'key role' in the *maternalization* of the state, providing it with 'the vocabulary, theory and set of practices which would enable the state to 'maternalize' itself.' (p. 16) and thus take on a caring role. Bar-Haim sees maternalism as a motivating, cultural force in the creation of the British post-war welfare state (pp. 17–21). This is indeed a view expressed earlier in this book when (p.289), a connection is made between the building of a welfare society, and the presence of a mother present for the whole of life, to meet the nurturant needs of adults

From the 1930s to the 1950s there was indeed a gradually increasing trend to acknowledge the role of mothers in the upbringing of children (ibid., p. 10). Psychoanalytic theory, despite Sigmund Freud's initial preoccupation with the role of fathers (Webster, 1996, p. 400), was crucial here. During the 1930s, psychoanalysts such as Ian Suttie, were strong protagonists of the need to give value to what they saw as prototypically maternal values, such as love, tenderness and care towards children (Bar-Haim, p. 31). Further, during the 1930s and, more particularly the 1940s, there was increasing political consensus that the State should take a much greater part not just in the upbringing of children but in the protection of the vulnerable in society, the poor, the disabled and the elderly (Timmins, pp. 161–63).

It is a far cry however from acceptance of the importance of psychoanalysis in our understanding of the need for good or at least good-enough care in the upbringing of children and the establishment of the British welfare state. Authoritative accounts of the establishment of the welfare state point to a whole range of other influences. Indeed Bar-Haim himself recognises this. He writes (ibid., p. 182–83) about a 'possible objection to the proposed argument of this research. One may

claim that, in many respects, British society was dominated not only by men in positions of power but also by the predominance of images of masculine authority. In this sense, it could be claimed, the maternalizing movement presented here was a nonrepresentational marginal strand in postwar public life.' Indeed so. Not only was the welfare state the brainchild of men such as William Beveridge and RA Butler, but they themselves were responding to powerful social and economic forces that can only be understood historically. The rioting that had followed the realisation of the men who returned from the First World War when they discovered that often there were no jobs and no homes for heroes; the economic depression with massive unemployment of the late 1920s and 1930s; the increasing political literacy of the men who fought in the Second World War: these were the influences on the male politicians who created the policies that led to the welfare state.

Further, there is strong evidence that the men responsible for the welfare state had no time for the idea that care and nurturance were its underlying values. William Beveridge, universally acknowledged as the main progenitor of the welfare state in the UK, 'hated the phrase 'welfare state' and refused to use it, disliking its 'Santa Claus' and 'brave new world' connotations.' (Timmins, p. 7). He saw the system he created primarily as an insurance scheme: people got back what they had insured against. Perhaps surprisingly to some, Winston Churchill, who, apart from his reputation as an inspiring war leader, is widely regarded as an illiberal reactionary, was one of the main positive influences in the development of the welfare state. In 1909, he was at least partly responsible for the social reforms carried out by the great Liberal administration of the time, led by David Lloyd-George (Jenkins, p. 147). It was Churchill who was Prime Minister when, in 1941, Beveridge was appointed to lead the Committee that produced the Report that carries his name. It was Churchill who, in the same year, appointed RA Butler to the Board of Education from where Butler produced the 1944 Education Act, the most influential piece of progressive educational reform for forty years. Yet Churchill was no friend of the 'psy' professions. In describing conflicting attitudes to the participation of psychiatrists in the selection of officers and in other roles, Ben Shephard (2000, p. 195) quotes Churchill who, in a memorandum dated December 1942, wrote of the proposal to attach psychiatrists, as well as other doctors, to military units, in these terms:

> ... it would be sensible to restrict as much as possible the work of these gentlemen who are capable of doing an immense amount of harm with what may very easily degenerate into charlatanry. The tightest hand should be kept over them and they should not be allowed to quarter themselves upon the Fighting Services at the public expense.

Nevertheless, elsewhere, Shephard notes (ibid., p. 164) '[...] while in Britain the Freudians were the only group not invited to contribute to wartime psychiatry, they provided many of the ideas and the interpretative tools on which it would rest.'

Although there is good reason to be sceptical about the role that psychoanalysis played in the creation of the welfare state, there can be no questioning its influence on society's increasing awareness of the importance of the bond between mother and infant. The significance of this realisation in the development of services for young children is strongly supported by the historical evidence. In this connection, John Bowlby's work on the deleterious effects of the separation of children from their mothers was crucial. As described in Chapter 11, Bowlby met with much hostility from leading psychoanalysts, particularly Melanie Klein, when he put forward these views. They saw his ideas as leading to neglect of what they saw as the more important intra-psychic conflicts experienced by young children. In his memoir of this period, as we saw in Chapter 11, Bowlby identifies Susan Isaacs as one of the very few psychoanalysts who was positive about his work.

For twenty-five years after the end of the Second World War, there was an almost unanimous acceptance by the public and by health professionals of the *paramount* importance of maternal care in the upbringing of young children. There were only a very few questioning voices. In 1964, Stella Chess, a leading American child psychiatrist, wrote an editorial for the American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, titled *Mal de Mére* in which she questioned the assumption made by mental health professionals that if there was something wrong with a child this must be because the mother was responsible. It was only in 1971, with the publication of Michael Rutter's *Maternal Deprivation Reassessed* that a more balanced view began to prevail with an awareness that emotional *deprivation* needed to be distinguished from maternal *separation* in determining the factors operating to the detriment of healthy child development.

Susan Isaacs as Anticolonialist

As well as pointing to the role of Susan Isaacs in the development of maternalism, Bar-Haim (2021) saw her as an important force in anti-colonialism. He writes (p. 71) Susan Isaacs could and should serve as 'a major example of the ways in which British inter-war psychology challenged the colonial project as a whole.' Anti-colonialism or anti-imperialism as it was then called (attacking the exploitation of economically under-developed countries by their imperialist conquerors), developed in the late nineteenth century. During the twentieth century it was powered by strong nationalist movements. The disintegration of the old colonial empires after the Second World War came about as a result of the exhaustion of the European colonial powers, not just those that were defeated but those that were victorious (Hobsbawm, 1994, p. 216).

Prior to the collapse of empire in the between war period, colonialism has been defended or at least partly justified by the views of some anthropologists, including Sir James Frazer and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl. They claimed that so-called colonial peoples were not capable of the same level of thought as were the 'civilized'. Among those who held this view was Jean Piaget, the Swiss developmental psychologist. Although ideas about the thinking of primitive peoples were not central to Piaget's thought, in *Language and Thought of the Child* (1926), he made connections between the thinking of 'savages, imbeciles and young children', implying that these groups shared immaturity of thought. As we have seen in Chapter Seven, Susan Isaacs was highly critical of Piaget's concept of developmental stages of children's thinking, taking the view that his findings were dependent on his mode of questioning children rather than on the way their thinking actually developed in 'real life.' According to her, the level of 'real life' thinking was far more dependent on children's experience than on their chronological age. By analogy, Piaget was guilty of the same fallacy when he wrote about the process of language development in 'primitive' peoples. Their levels of thought were also far more related to their experiences than to any innate deficiency of thought.

In a series of lectures on anthropology delivered at the Institute of Psychoanalysis in the mid-1930s, the notes for which are quoted in

Bar-Haim (ibid., p. 71) Susan Isaacs expanded on these ideas, with a particular focus on the work of Geza Roheim, a Hungarian psychoanalyst who studied the modes of thinking about totemism of central Australian peoples. In a review of Roheim's book, *The Riddle of the Sphinx*, Isaacs wrote 'savages were not nearly so savage as the anthropologists; or in other words, that they are not nearly so mysterious as one would think from reading Tyler, Frazer, Levy-Bruhl, or even Róheim' (Isaacs, p. 382)'

The claim made by Bar-Haim that Susan Isaacs 'should be located within these Bloomsbury networks of anticolonialism [...]' must however be met with some scepticism. Although it is true that Leonard Woolf, a leading anti-colonialist following his experiences as a district officer in Ceylon (as it then was), did live in Bloomsbury, the main centre of radical opposition to colonialism in London in the 1930s was a mile further south at the London School of Economics where Harold Laski was a key figure. Isaacs had no contact with the leading nationalist leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi. Further, although she worked at the Institute of Education which is indeed in Bloomsbury, she and her husband Nathan actually lived not in Bloomsbury as claimed in this book, but in Primrose Hill, a couple of miles north-west. Here it is true, their home welcomed pioneers in progressive education, but it is doubtful if they had anything at all to do with anti-colonialists, such as Leonard Woolf. Isaacs does not seem to be mentioned in any of the extensive memoirs of members of the Bloomsbury Group. As the Chair of its English branch, Isaacs was deeply involved with the New Education Fellowship (NEF), an international organisation that campaigned for educational reform (see above). However, there is no evidence that she was involved in any of its wider political activities. In particular, as we saw in Chapter 10, during the 1937 lecture tour to Australia and New Zealand organised by the NEF in which she participated, there does not seem to have been any discussion of anti-colonialism.

Conclusion

Twenty-first century scholarship has amply confirmed Susan Isaacs' reputation as an enduring, major influence in child-centred education. While in the seventy-five years since her death, enthusiasm for child-centred education has waxed and waned, she has continued to be seen as

a source of inspiration to those who see active participation of children in their own learning as fundamental to the educational process. New information on Geoffrey Pyke's views on the rationale for the pedagogic ideas that underlay the educational experience at the Malting House School are of great interest, but do not reduce the importance of the influence of Melanie Klein on its philosophy. Suggestions however that Melanie Klein was the paramount influence on the advice Susan Isaacs gave to parents in the magazine columns she wrote for them, fail to acknowledge the other important influences on her views on child-rearing.

A considerable increase in the amount of scientific evaluation of the effectiveness of child psychotherapy, a field in which Susan Isaacs was undoubtedly a pioneer, has added to the evidence of the validity of this therapeutic approach. Similarly, the experience of those engaged in providing care and services to children whose lives have been disrupted and continue to be disrupted to this day by armed conflict have strongly confirmed Susan Isaacs's views on the principles of care for such children. The Cambridge Evacuation Survey remains a model for those wishing to evaluate the effectiveness of measures taken to protect children's mental health in times of war.

In contrast, there have recently been some exaggerated claims for the importance of Susan Isaacs and other psychoanalysts in thinking leading to the establishment of the British Welfare State in the late 1940s. Similarly, efforts to place her as a significant figure in inter-war movement against colonialism seem misplaced. Susan Isaacs's place in history as a major influence in child-centred education and as a key player in the promotion of Kleinian ideas, is well established. Her reputation does not need the additional embellishment some twenty-first scholars have tried to achieve for her.