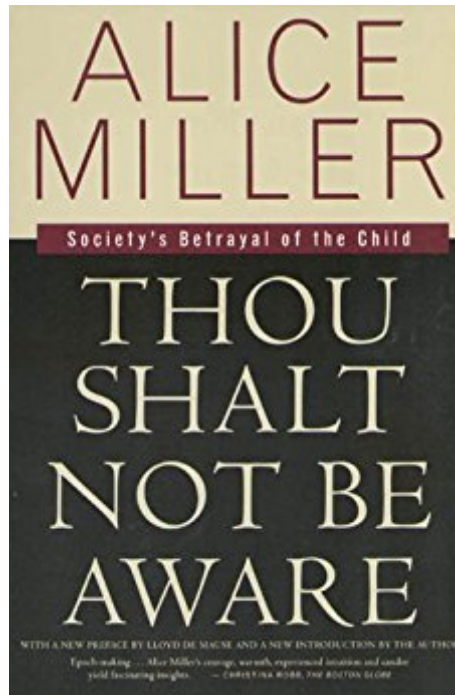


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Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal Of The Child



Synopsis

Originally published in 1984, *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware* explodes Freud's notions of "infantile sexuality" and helps to bring to the world's attention the brutal reality of child abuse, changing forever our thoughts of "traditional" methods of child-rearing. Dr. Miller exposes the harsh truths behind children's "fantasies" by examining case histories, works of literature, dreams, and the lives of such people as Franz Kafka, Virginia Woolf, Gustave Flaubert, and Samuel Beckett. Now with a new preface by Lloyd de Mause and a new introduction by the author, *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware* continues to bring an essential understanding to the confrontation and treatment of the devastating effects of child abuse.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Thou Shalt Not Be Aware is one of the finest theoretical books demonstrating how parents betray their children and how devastating this is for the child. Yet Alice Miller, wonderful writer that she is, cannot fully absorb the significance of her own message. This denial pervades her writing and weakens her book's impact. She spends over three hundred pages of *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware*

showing how parents damage their children, yet she refuses to hold parents accountable. (Page 58: "[People cannot] grasp that I blame neither children nor parents.") In effect, she, one of the 20th century's greatest trumpeters for the child's rights, herself creates a theory which abandons the full truth of the child. Shying away from the strength of her message, she compromises as best she can, turns vague, and blames society instead. Thus, the subtitle of the book: "Society's Betrayal Of The Child." It is not society that primarily betrays children. It really is parents. Yet Alice Miller, a parent of two children herself and a woman who never came close to processing her own unresolved grief from her own childhood - stemming from maltreatment by her own parents, not society - cannot accept that. It is too painful. Thus it comes as no great surprise that years after writing this book, when she herself entered deep therapy to resolve her childhood traumas once and for all, her true past horrors surfaced and she suffered a near-psychotic breakdown. A 1995 interview says it all: "At the end of these three weeks my feelings were in a turmoil, so that I could not find sleep, that for the first time in my life I thought of suicide, and had anxiety verging on the psychotic."

Alice Miller makes her perspective so clear and so unavoidable in this book that it is all but impossible not to feel your stomach go up in knots as you try to think about everyone's life that it explains--from best friends to her analysis of author Franz Kafka--but your own. Without hanging Freud in effigy or throwing the baby of his genius out with the bathwater of his philosophical and ethical judgement errors, Miller established her perspective and cry for new psychological techniques based in compassionate listening to others lives and childhoods (instead of forcing others lives into a preexisting paradigm) magnificently. The effect of her work begins with her establishment of Freud's drive theory--Oedipal complex, et. al.--as merely an artistic, pseudo-scientific extension of the very Judeo-Christian, Victorian Age system of morality that allowed for secret atrocities to be routinely committed on innocent children in the first place. Its existential inadequacy in charting the anatomy of the soul (which is what the word "psyche" means) comes up in virtually every psychoanalysed person and derivative doctrine and explains much if not most of the profound failures of the entire discipline in Western society this past century (and, definitively, people's lack of faith in it). It's as if Freud, like Shakespeare or Bach, created a new language with many of the materials of the popular one being used; only unlike Shakespeare or Bach then chose, because of the martyrdom that sticking to his real discoveries demanded of him, to basically backpeddle and translate all of the same antequated ideas he should have replaced into it.

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