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Bad Faith *versus* Unconscious: a Credible Alternative?

It's certainly not too late, after more than one century of psychoanalysis, to evaluate again the main hypothesis on which Freud's research is based, I mean the hypothesis that the major part of our psychological life is unconscious. Everybody knows, of course, Freud's comparison between the psyche and an iceberg, according to which ninety percent of the psyche is unconscious.

Around forty years ago, when I was a student, this hypothesis was so obvious that it seemed there was no way to criticize it. Just like we "knew" from Marxism that history was the history of class struggles, we "knew" from depth psychology that we were more or less neurotic and that our lives were dominated by unconscious conflicts, which were deep-rooted in our childhood. In other words, we were absolutely convinced that Freud, as he wrote himself, had inflicted, after Copernicus, after Darwin, a third blow to the universal self-love of the humanity. This blow, which is psychological in nature, would be the discovery that "the ego is not master in its own house" (Freud 1917/1955. 135. et sq.).

But now, in 2019, it has to be said that Freud's way of thinking has already lost a part of its credit, especially among the youth and even, perhaps, among the psychoanalysts themselves. However, it's certainly not a reason to declare that the hypothesis of the unconscious is irrelevant, null and void. Therefore, I would like to examine whether and how it's possible to keep Freud's hypothesis. My main reference will be obviously Jean-Paul Sartre, but because it seems to me that Sartre's criticism of psychoanalysis has to be understood as an extension of Heidegger's ontological point of view, I would like to begin with Heidegger's criticism of Freud's hypothesis. Then, I'll consider Sartre's concept of bad faith and develop the idea of a negative psychology.

I. MARTIN HEIDEGGER, MEDARD BOSS AND THE PRINCIPLE OF SUFFICIENT REASON

The loss of credit of psychoanalysis doesn't come as much of a surprise, if we take into account the fact that psychoanalysis has been criticised for a long time and since the very beginning by various philosophers. We think of Karl Jaspers – and I'm glad to pay tribute to his memory – but also of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Karl Popper, Adolf Grünbaum, Alasdair MacIntyre, Jürgen Habermas and also, if we limit ourselves to French thinkers, of Jean-Paul Sartre, Emmanuel Levinas, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Vincent Descombes, and so on (our list is obviously not exhaustive). But if I had to choose among all these critics, with whose works – honestly speaking – I'm more or less familiar, it's certainly Heidegger and its point of view I would first select, as the most relevant one. In fact, Heidegger knew very little about psychoanalysis and was apparently not concerned by Freud's research. He had however the opportunity to speak about Freud's work when he met the Swiss psychiatrist Medard Boss after the Second World War, and also during a seminar organised both by Heidegger and Boss in Zollikon, at the home of Medard Boss, between 1959–1969. We have the protocols of the seminars, which can be completed with Medard Boss's own writing about psychoanalysis. (Heidegger 2001; Boss 1963; Escoubas 1992.)

Heidegger's review is based on an ontological argument, according to which the categories we use to describe natural phenomena don't fit human phenomena. For natural phenomena belong to one form of being whereas human phenomena belong to another. It means you can't think and speak of a human behaviour as if it was a physical or chemical process. As a result, human sciences have to ban from their vocabulary such words as "energy", "force", "cause and effect" which are used in the fields of modern natural sciences. From this point of view, it's easy to understand why Heidegger refuses Freud's hypothesis. As a matter of fact, Freud's metapsychology is full of this kind of concepts and, as we know, Freud identifies *libido* with a sexual "energy". But there is an other critical argument, a bit more difficult to explain: when Freud, in a very famous text, wants to justify the concept of unconscious, he writes: "the data of consciousness have a very large number of gaps in them; both in healthy and in sick people psychical acts often occur which can be explained only by presupposing other acts, of which, nevertheless, consciousness affords no evidence" (Freud 1914–1916. 165). We have therefore to fill in the blanks with the unconscious acts in order to establish the full text. But if we understand this statement with Heidegger, it follows that Freud's way of thinking is based on a kind of ontological prejudice, which comes from modern natural sciences, that's the idea of a causal connexion and causal explanation without gaps or blanks. From this point of view the first root of Freud's Hypothesis is the modern principle of causality. Since he presumed an unbroken causal connexion in the psychical life, Freud

imagines unconscious acts. The door is now open for a more elaborate hypothesis of the unconscious itself as the main part of the mental life. (Heidegger 2001. *Conversation with Medard Boss in 1965*).

II. FREUD'S AMBIGUOUS CONCEPTION OF THE UNCONSCIOUS AND SARTRE'S CONCEPT OF BAD FAITH

It seems to me that Sartre's criticism of psychoanalysis has to be understood as an extension of Heidegger's ontological point of view. In other words, Sartre's criticism is based again on an ontological argument and on the conviction that human mode of being excludes such a *thing* – and let me stress this last word – such a *thing* as the unconscious. In *Being and Nothingness* (Sartre 1994), as we know, Sartre opposes two different modes of being: on the one hand, the thing as in-itself (*l'en-soi*): for example, a stone or a cigarette is an in-itself, and, on the other hand, the conscious as a for-itself (*le pour-soi*): for instance, a desire or a feeling, as given to the consciousness, shares necessarily the mode of being of the consciousness. From this point of view, it's meaningless to speak of an unconscious desire, of an unconscious guilt feeling and so on. And not, as is often said, because the subject is transparent to itself – such an idea never occurs by Sartre who always distinguishes between the consciousness of self and the knowledge of self.¹ But because being conscious is both a quality of a lived process and a mode of being, so that desires or feelings as lived processes share therefore the mode of being of what is for-itself. For instance, to imagine something is nothing else but an act of the consciousness and has necessarily an intentional and temporal form or structure. If not, the imagination is then an impossible and absurd mix of in-itself and for-itself, which is supposed to subsist in the unconscious part of the psyche like a picture in a gallery.

One can object that these considerations don't concern Freud's hypothesis, in so far as the Freudian unconscious can't be assimilated to a thing in-itself. From this point of view, the comparison of the psyche with an iceberg is just a comparison and must not be taken literally. In fact, Freud's description of the unconscious is relatively ambiguous. Paul Ricœur is certainly right when he says, in his essay about Freud, that "Freud's writings present themselves as a mixed or even ambiguous discourse, which at times states conflict of forces subject to an energetics, at times relations of meaning subject to a hermeneutics" (Ricœur 1970. 65, 395). As a result, it's possible to read from Freud himself a description of the unconscious that substitutes the economic language for an intentional one. For example, when it comes to repression, Freud compares this pheno-

¹ Borrowing the expression to Maurice Barrès, Sartre speaks of a "mystery in broad daylight" (Sartre 1994. 571).

menon with the intentional action of a watchman.² Of course and again, it's only a comparison and Freud underlines himself its unscientific character³. But this kind of presentation is nevertheless meaningful of a difficulty that Sartre points out in *Being and Nothingness*: how could a blind force repress unpleasant drives or impulses without being aware of their unpleasant character for the ego? In other words, which I borrow from Sartre, "if we abandon all the metaphors representing the repression as the impact of blind forces, we are compelled to admit that the censor must choose and in order to choose must be aware of so doing" (Sartre 1994. 52).

Everybody knows, I suppose, Sartre's alternative proposal to Freud's concept of the unconscious, which can be summed up in the concept of bad faith or, as it has been proposed, in the concept of self-deception (Soll 1981. 584). Quite close to Sartre on this matter, Merleau-Ponty, for its part, speaks of a "metaphysical hypocrisy" (Merleau-Ponty 1985. 190). From this point of view, the so-called repression of an idea is nothing but the act of lying to oneself and the real question is then to understand how it's possible for a subject to lie to himself. For Sartre is convinced that the hysteric as a neurotic is aware of what he doesn't want to be aware of and, as long as he tries to escape from it, the hysteric is necessarily aware of what he tries to escape from. He would not be trying otherwise to escape from it. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre quotes Freud's dissident follower, Wilhelm Stekel who states: "Every time that I have been able to carry my investigations far enough, I have established that the crux of the psychosis was conscious" (Sartre 1994. 54). And the same goes for the homosexual who refuses with all his strength to consider himself as a homosexual, even if he (or she) recognises to have had sexual relationships with people of the same gender (Sartre 1994. 54, 63).⁴

In this way of thinking, it's worth examining MacIntyre's plea, after Wittgenstein, for an adverbial conception of the unconscious (MacIntyre 1958. 77; 1984. 71). According to MacIntyre, there are two ways of using the word 'unconscious': either as an adjective and as an adverb or as a noun and as a substantive. In the former case, the adjective unconscious enables us to describe human pheno-

² The watchman stands between the drawing room and a large entrance hall, and doesn't admit into the drawing room the impulses which displease him (Freud 1916–1917. Ch. 19, *Resistance and repression*).

³ « On peut donc dire que la conscience vire les désirs indésirables à la manière dont un enseignant met à la porte les élèves qui perturbent la classe » (Bernet 2013. 343).

⁴ One can object that Sartre misses the point. What is actually at stake, according to Freud, is not the homosexuality of one who is aware of his sexual orientation but deny to be homosexual. But it is, as well as in Leonardo da Vinci's case studied by Freud, the unconscious drives of a man who preserves his love for his mother by repressing it and who seems to pursue boys and to be their lover while he is in reality running away from other women who might cause him to be unfaithful to his mother. But it's easy to conceive Sartre's reply: Leonardo can run away from other girls and pursue boys only if he is aware of his so called unconscious love for his mother. The concept of bad faith is back again. (Freud: *Leonardo...* Ch. 3.)

mena like dreams, jokes, neurotic symptoms, traumas, and so on; in the latter, as noun, unconscious pretends to explain and to give the cause of these kinds of phenomena. In others words, according to MacIntyre (and, of course, Freud), a great deal of human phenomena express an unconscious intention and we have therefore to extend our concept of intention; but we have no evidence and no need of the unconscious as a part of the psyche. Let's take the case of "a man involved in an unhappy love affair who tells his friend that he intends to break free from it, but who continues to see the girl and to send her gifts". MacIntyre asks: "what are we to say his intentions in fact are?" Two interpretations are at least possible. First, the man lies to himself, he acts in bad faith; second, the man is divided between two conflicting intentions: his conscious intention is to leave the girl, the unconscious intention, only expressed by his behaviour, is to stay along with her (MacIntyre 1958. 84).

Let's take another example: Chimène's understatement (*litote*): "Go I do not disdain you" (*Va, je ne te hais point*). The sentence comes from Pierre Corneille's famous tragicomedy, *Le Cid*. As it is well-known at least in France, Rodrigue and Chimène were in love; but the marriage became suddenly impossible for Rodrigue killed Chimène's father in a duel; Chimène states that she hates Rodrigue; but, as Rodrigue offers Chimène to kill him, Chimène finally declares: "Go I do not disdain you". This sentence is interpreted by Vincent Descombes as if Chimène was unconsciously (adverb) expressing her love. We would have therefore to distinguish between the intentional anger which Chimène declares and the intentional love which is declared by Chimène's sentence but of which Chimène is unconscious. But a much simpler interpretation is also possible without such a hypothesis like unconscious intention: "Go I do not disdain you" expresses very well the evolution of her emotional life and her current state of mood.⁵ In others words, because Rodrigue killed her father, Chimène is no more in love with Rodrigue but at this point she no more suffers because of hate. It follows from this short analysis that the concept of bad faith can quite well clarify behaviours, whose elucidation seems demand unconscious intention.

III. THE UNCONSCIOUS AS CONCEPT OF A NEGATIVE PSYCHOLOGY

It's time to raise the ultimate question, which is the real guideline of this paper: if we give up Freud's hypothesis of a mental unconscious as a thing in-itself, can we be satisfied in any cases with the concept of bad faith? In other words, I would like to develop the idea that there are some phenomena, which call an-

⁵ P. Corneille, *Le Cid*, acte III, scène 4, vers 963. Descombes 1984; 1977/ 2004.

other interpretation. The study of these phenomena leads perhaps to a renewed concept of the unconscious. In this context, I'm going to consider the link that Freud introduces between homosexuality and the unconscious.

In his essay about Leonardo da Vinci, Freud expresses a general explanation of homosexuality as a result of an unconscious love for one's mother and of a psycho-sexual development. But to tell the truth, the most important part of Freud's explanation is not the explanation itself but the following part, when Freud comments on his own explanation. For Freud, regarding Leonardo's homosexuality is fully aware of the much too general character of the incestuous love. So, he adds this cautious remark: "we cannot reject the supposed cooperation of unknown constitutional factors" (Freud: *Leonardo* ... Ch. 3). Of course, as a scientist, as a follower of the Enlightenment, as a hyper-rationalist, Freud is convinced that these constitutional factors are not destined to remain unknown. But, and here is the thesis I would like to defend, it's possible to give another conception of these "unknown constitutional factors", if we put aside the principle of reason as well as the way of thinking which is based on it.

So influential is this principle upon our mind that we cannot help but think under its control. However, when Jean-Paul Sartre, in his essay on Jean Genet, tries to understand why Jean Genet became a thief, a poet and a homosexual, his interpretation stands actually beyond the principle of reason, in so far as Sartre relates homosexuality to Jean Genet's own tragic situation and to a free choice. From this point of view, homosexuality has nothing to do with constitutional factors but, like the genius, is "the way out some one invents in desperate cases" (Sartre 1952. quatrième de couverture). However, even if Sartre's thesis deserves our attention, it has to be said that this appeal to freedom doesn't fit the lived experience. But there is, of course, another way of understanding the phenomenon of sexual orientation. If we admit the limit of all kinds of explanations, we can understand these constitutional factors as an *innate* predisposition. Innate: the adjective sounds perhaps strange. We speak for instance of an innate gift for music or for mathematics, that is to say of an unexplainable and unacquired feature of the character. In this same way of thinking, when the German psychiatrist Hubertus Tellenbach, in his major work on melancholia, shapes the *typus melancholicus* as a personality vulnerable to melancholia, he carefully avoids asking why this one or that one has such a premorbid profile (Tellenbach 1961).

As regards homosexuality (or heterosexuality), the adjective "innate" means on the one hand that you don't choose your sexual orientation and on the other hand that besides all explanations –more or less credible – from the family, the education, the personal story, the society and its heteronormativity, and so on, remains a dark, unknown and unknowable side of the personality. Far from meaning that the ego is master in its own house, it means the opposite, that its existence comes actually from deeper than itself, than its history, from a depth

or a dark side which cannot be enlightened.⁶ Therefore, I would like to argue in favour of a negative psychopathology. That is to say, if I may make such an analogy, just as we know from negative theology that it is impossible to say anything positive about God, we ought to know from negative psychology that we can't unlock the enigmatic character of a personality. This issue has nothing to do with the ethics but with our senseless claim to know totally a person. It follows, given the mode of being of the subject, that it's possible to state that the unconscious is neither a result of a past and repressed event, nor a thing, a device or a machine. And, if we don't want to deceive ourselves with unjustified speculations, we have to say, but according to a phenomenological point of view, "whereof one cannot speak whereof one must be silent" (Wittgenstein 1999. 7).

IV. CONCLUSION

My starting point was the opposition of Freud's unconscious and Sartre's bad faith. The question was: does Sartre's bad faith constitute a credible alternative to Freud's unconscious? Of course, it does *and* it doesn't. It does, for a lot of behaviours are understandable without the obscure hypothesis of the unconscious, which offers then no more light. It doesn't, if we take into account the story of the subject in his time. The roots of this unconscious would be the past of the subject and its ontological mode would be the enigmatic one of the past in so far as it runs the present subject. But, regarding what Freud himself calls "constitutional factors", there is another and obvious mode of the unconscious.⁷ These "constitutional factors" represent the innate part of the human being, which belongs to its nature and which also runs its behaviour. It can be a gift or a burden, which in any cases the subject doesn't choose and has to assume. Of course, this latter mode of the unconscious is quite different from the former. It has no immediate links with the past of the subject and belongs to what we can call with Heidegger the *facticity* of its existence. One can feel disappointed in this conception since there are no more stories to imagine and to tell about it, lying on the couch. But if we are able to back away from the principle of reason, we are ready to admit the limit of a kind of psychological inquiry, which tries to explain what is unexplainable and must remain unexplainable.

⁶ From this point of view I agree with Rudolf Bernet, when he writes in his last book about the subject as the subject of the unconscious: "For the most fundamental question is not whether the ego is an object or a subject but whether the subject of the desire [...] is the producer of his desire or just an effect of fantasies which overwhelm him and come from deeper than himself" (Bernet 2013. 336).

⁷ With W. Blankenburg and Arthur Tatossian, it's possible to consider a third mode of unconscious that is the transcendental unconscious as the *a priori* condition of the natural attitude. Belongs, for instance to this mode of unconscious the natural self-evidence that is unfortunately missing by schizophrenia. (Blankenburg 1991; Tatossian 1997; 2020).

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