

60 The ego in Freud's theory and in the technique of psychoanalysis

Please read Freud. You are going to have three weeks. And while worshipping the Golden Calf, keep a small book of the law in your hand, read *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* with the introduction I am giving you as a small key. You'll see that either it makes not the least bit of sense or it has exactly the sense I say it has.

From when we started up to the present, Freud says, we took as a principle that the psychic apparatus, in so far as it is organised, is to be placed between the pleasure principle and the reality principle. Freud, of course, in his thinking isn't inclined to idolification. It never occurred to him that there wasn't a pleasure principle in the reality principle. For if you follow reality, it is only because the reality principle is a delayed-action pleasure principle. Conversely, if the pleasure principle exists, it is in conformity to some reality – this reality is psychic reality.

If the psyche has any meaning, if there is a reality which is called psychic reality, or, in other words, if living beings exist, it is in so far as there is an internal organisation which up to a certain point tends to oppose the free and unlimited passage of forces and discharges of energy, such as we may assume to exist, in a purely theoretical way, intercrossing in the inanimate reality. There is a closed precinct, within which a certain equilibrium is maintained, through the action of a mechanism which we now call homeostasis, which absorbs, moderates the irruption of quantities of energy coming from the external world.

Let us call this regulation the *resistive function of the psychic organisation*. At a very elementary level, the frog's leg gives us an idea of it. Not only is there discharge, but withdrawal – which testifies to the still very primitive functioning of a principle of restitution, of equilibration of the machine.

Freud doesn't have the term homeostasis, he uses that of inertia, and that is an echo of Fechnerism. Do you know that there are two sides to Fechner? On one side, he is the psycho-physicist, asserting that only the principles of physics can allow one to symbolise psychic processes. But there is another side of Fechner, which few people know, which is quite unique. He goes a long way down the path of universal subjectivisation, and would no doubt have given a realist reading of my little apologue the other day, which was very far from being my intention. I wasn't telling you that the reflection of the mountain in the lake was a dream of the cosmos, but you would be able to find that in Fechner.

Discharge and return to the position of equilibrium – this law of regulation is valid for both systems, says Freud. But by the same token he is led to ask himself – what is the relation between these two systems? Is it simply that what is pleasure in the one is unpleasure in the other, and vice versa? If the two systems were the inverse of one another, one should be able to arrive at a general law of equilibrium, and on that account, there would be an analysis of the ego which would be the analysis of the unconscious inside out. That, put in a theoretical way, is the problem I put to you earlier.

This is where Freud realises that something doesn't satisfy the pleasure principle. He realises that what comes out of one of the systems – that of the unconscious – has a very particular insistence – that is the word I wanted to bring in. I say *insistence* because it expresses rather well, in a familiar way, the meaning of what has been translated into French as *automatisme de répétition*, *Wiederholungszwang* [compulsion to repeat]. The word *automatisme* has resonances for us of the complete ascendancy of neurology. That isn't how it should be understood. What it is is a compulsion to repeat [compulsion à la répétition], and that is why I think I am making it concrete by introducing the notion of insistence.

This system has something disturbing about it. It is dissymmetrical. It doesn't quite fit. Something in it eludes the system of equations and the evidence borrowed from the forms of thought of the register of energetics as they were introduced in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Yesterday evening, Professor Lagache brought out for you, a bit quickly, Condillac's statue. I cannot recommend the rereading of the *Traité des Sensations* too highly. Firstly, because it is an absolutely delightful read, with an inimitable period style. In it, you will see that my primitive state of a subject to be found everywhere, and which in some sense is the visual image, has some sort of ancestry. In Condillac, the scent of the rose seems a very solid starting-point, out of which the entire psychic edifice has to be drawn, without any apparent difficulty, like a rabbit from a hat.

The jumps in his reasoning give us cause for consternation, but that wasn't the case for his contemporaries – Condillac wasn't deluded. Why, it must be asked, doesn't he give an explicit formulation to the pleasure principle? Because, as M. de la Pallice would reply, 'he didn't have a formula for it, because he came before the steam engine. The era of the steam engine, its industrial exploitation, and administrative projects and balance-sheets, were needed, for us to ask the question – what does a machine yield?

For Condillac, as for others, more comes out than was put in. They were metaphysicians. Whatever one makes of it – my usual discourse isn't generally coloured by a progressivist tendency – one must admit that new things do emerge in the symbolic order. At some point it was realised that to draw the rabbit out of the hat you always have to have put it in beforehand. That is the principle of energetics, and that is why energetics is also a metaphysics.

It is the principle of homeostasis which obliges Freud to inscribe all his deductions in terms of investment, charge, discharge, energy relations between different systems. However, he realises that something doesn't work in all this. That's what *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is about, no more no less.

At first, he picks up on a very local point, the well-known phenomenon of the

repetition of dreams in cases of traumatic neuroses, which contravene the rule of the pleasure principle, in as much as for dreams it is embodied in the principle of the imaginary fulfilment of desire. Freud asks himself – *Why on earth is there an exception in this particular case?* But one sole exception can't put into question something as fundamental as the pleasure principle, which is the principle of regulation which enables one to inscribe the concrete functioning of man considered as a machine in a coherent system of symbolic formulations. This principle isn't deduced from his theory, it forms the basis of his thought in as much as in his time one thought in that particular register. So if you read this text, you will see that among the different exceptions he mentions, none seems to him quite sufficient to put the principle into question. But the exceptions, taken as a whole, seem to him to converge.

You were telling me earlier on that I would end up by getting ship-wrecked on a reef, and that somewhere we'll meet up with this subject, in the form of an idol. Are we playing hunt-the-slipper here? Anyway, that is what Freud is playing. For the very phenomenon on which analysis is based is the following – aiming at remembering, and whether we encounter it or not, we come upon the reproduction, in the guise of the transference, of something which manifestly belongs to the other system.

DR LECLAIRE: *I would like to answer all at once, because I feel somewhat got at. I think that you are reproaching me a great deal for having pulled the rabbit out of the hat in which I had placed it. But really, I'm not so sure that it was me who put it there. I did pull it out, true, but it wasn't me who put it in. That is the first thing I had to say to you, but that's not all. The second is this. Regarding the subject of the unconscious, you have accused me of idolification; however, I said that I was representing it, even though to be rigorous, it, like Jehovah, should be neither represented, nor named. Nonetheless, I did represent it, knowing what I was doing. I have the feeling you carry this idolification over from one side to the other.*

Dear Leclaire, it seems to me that many people here may not have felt that you were put on the line to the extent you feel you were. Of course, I acknowledge and indeed admire the fact that you did things as you say you did, knowing what you were doing. What you did last night was very much under control, you knew perfectly well what you were doing, you didn't do it innocently. That is greatly to your credit. Having said that, we are going to see whether what you are suggesting now is true. What you forewarned me would be a reef is more than avoidable – it's already avoided.

DR LECLAIRE: *I simply have the feeling that this phenomenon of avoidance is reproduced every time we speak of the subject. Every time, it is a kind of reaction, when we speak of the subject.*

What do you mean by avoidance?

DR LECLAIRE: *Riddance,<sup>6</sup> just that.*

Let us not get side-tracked here please. It isn't the same avoidance.

There is a restitutive function, which is that of the pleasure principle. But there is also a repetitive function. How do they fit together?

The subject may reproduce one experience indefinitely, some characteristics of which are discovered through remembering. Lord knows what difficulty you have in apprehending what satisfaction the subject gains from it. I already explained this to you some years back, in relation to the *Wolfman*. What is this insistence on the part of the subject to reproduce? Reproduce what? Is it in his behaviour? Is it in his fantasies? Is it in his character? Is it even in his ego? All kinds of things, from entirely different registers, can be used as material and as elements in this reproduction.

The reproduction in the transference within analysis is obviously only a particular case of a far more diffuse reproduction, which we take on in what is called character analysis, analysis of the total personality, and other nonsenses.

Freud asks himself what the inexhaustible nature of this reproduction means, from the point of view of the pleasure principle. Does it occur because of something unruly, or does it obey a different, more fundamental principle?

I leave the question open – what is the nature of the principle which governs what is at issue, namely the subject? Is it assimilable, reducible, symbolisable? Is it something? Or can it neither be named, nor grasped, but only structured?

This will be the theme of the lectures for our next term.

15 December 1954

<sup>6</sup> English in the original.

1954-1955  
Lectures