

# Responses to Students of Philosophy Concerning the Object of Psychoanalysis<sup>1</sup>

## I. Consciousness and the Subject

You have spoken of the mirage engendered by a confusion between consciousness and the subject, a mirage denounced by the experience of psychoanalysis. Now philosophy speaks of consciousness (the Cartesian cogito, transcendental consciousness, Hegelian self-consciousness, Husserl's apodictic cogito, Sartre's prereflexive cogito . . .): how does the psychoanalytic experience account for the misprision engendered within a subject by the fact of identifying with one's consciousness?

What is consciousness for a psychoanalyst?

Is it possible to get someone to "step out" of his consciousness? Is not the subject of (a) consciousness condemned to it?

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That concerning which you say I spoke seems to me rather to have been excerpted by you from a text that I wrote in homage to the memory of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the only one, I hope, to lend to a confusion that I must clarify first in your reading.

I write that "the 'I think' to which presence (according to the preceding: that of the phenomenological subject) would be reduced does not cease implying . . . all the powers or reflection through which subject and consciousness are fused." This does not mean that there is anything in the nature of a confusion involved. At a crucial point of the Cartesian *askesis*, precisely the one I am invoking here, consciousness and the subject coincide. It is holding that privileged moment as exhaustive of the subject which is misleading—making of it the pure category that the presence of a gaze (as a mode of opaqueness within

1. See "Maurice Merleau-Ponty" in *Les Temps modernes*, 1961, nos. 184–185.

the visible) would come to make flesh with its vision (the context of my sentence).

It is, on the contrary, at that moment of coincidence itself, in so far as it is grasped by reflection, that I intend to mark the site through which psychoanalytic experience makes its entrance. At simply being sustained within time, the subject of the "I think" reveals what it is: the being of a fall. I am that which thinks: "Therefore I am," as I have commented on elsewhere, noting that the "therefore," the causal stroke, divides inaugurally the "I am" of existence from the "I am" of meaning.

That rift or split (*refente*) is precisely that whereof psychoanalysis affords us a daily experience. I have castration anxiety at the same time as I regard it as impossible. Such is the crude example with which Freud illustrates that split, reproduced at all levels of subjective structure.

I say that it ought to be held as primordial and as the first cast of primary repression.

I say that the philosophical "consciousnesses" you have lined up on the skewer right up to Sartre at the tip have no other function than to suture that cleavage of the subject, and the analyst recognizes what is at stake in this bolting shut of the truth (for which the perfect instrument would plainly be the ideal promised to us by Hegel as absolute knowledge).

The pretext with which that operation always disguises itself is betrayed by the style of the good apostle, which is illustrated particularly well in the discourse of Leibniz. It is in order to "save the truth" that the door is shut on it.

That is why the question of an initial error in philosophy imposes itself as soon as Freud has produced the unconscious on the stage he assigned to it ("the other stage," as he calls it) and accords it the right to speak.

That is what Lacan comes back to, because the lifting of the seal is so threatening that its very practitioners dream of nothing else than relegating it elsewhere. That right, I say, is held by the unconscious by dint of what it structures as language, and I would clarify the illumination without end with which Freud allows that fact to reverberate if you had asked me the question organized around the terms: the unconscious and the subject.

I would then have been able to add to it this complement: that that very reason is not sufficient to establish that right, and that what is needed, as in the establishment of any right, is a transition to action, and that it is in the presence of that that the psychoanalyst today is in retreat.

That is why what I teach is not addressed in its initial impetus to philosophers. It is not, if I may say so, on your front that I am fighting.

For it is remarkable that you are asking me questions without troubling yourselves about wherein I am authorized to sustain positions that you attribute to me with more or less exactitude. The site of the utterance, be it known, is essential in not being elided from any statement.

Distrust, then, your own precipitousness: for a while yet, nourishment will not be lacking for philosophical grazing. But it is simply that a psychoanalytic acting out — or transition to action — might prompt it to recognize substance on the side of penury.

It is not up to psychoanalysis to account for philosophical error for the benefit of philosophy, as though philosophy thereafter would be able to “realize” or account for it itself. There can be no such thing, since to imagine it is precisely philosophical error itself. The subject is not wrong to identify with his consciousness, as you have me put it, God knows why, but in being compelled to miss the topology which makes a fool of him in that identification.

I have said: topology. For that is what prevails here. I mean that without structure, it is impossible to grasp anything of the *real* of the economy: of the cathexis or investment, as one says, even without knowing what one is saying.

It is for having lacked the elaboration prepared at this juncture by linguistics that Freud hesitated to decide as to the origin of the charge, which he distinguished in consciousness, quite perspicacious in recognizing it to be excessive in relation to the epiphenomenal slimness to which a certain physiology was intent on reducing it, and freeing himself therefrom, indicating to his followers the phenomenon of attention in order to cross swords.

An apparently insufficient clue: psychoanalysts have rarely known how to make use of a key when Freud did not teach them how it opens. Perhaps the advance I am making this year toward a certain object called “*petit a*” will permit some progress on this score.

I hope, then, to have restored to its proper place the function of a confusion which was first of all in your question.

The remainder of the text, if it is indeed the one you are referring to, shows precisely that what it is aiming at, at this juncture, is the danger of a reduction of the subject to the *ego*. It is that recentering, during a period of psychoanalytic slumber, of psychoanalytic theory on the *ego* that I was obliged to denounce at length in order to render possible a return to Freud.

By what trick of fate was that disaffected accessory, to wit: the *ego* — which served as no more than a label for psychology itself, once that discipline was intent on being a bit more objective — elevated precisely at the time when one would have expected its critique to be taken up anew from the perspective of the subject?

This can be conceived solely by way of the slippage undergone by psychoanalysis at being confronted with the managerial exploitation of psychology, particularly in its use for job recruitment.

The *autonomous ego*, the conflict-free sphere proposed as a new Gospel by Mr. Heinz Hartmann to the New York circle is no more than the ideology of a class of immigrants preoccupied with the prestigious values prevailing in cen-

tral European society when with the diaspora of the war they had to settle in a society in which values sediment according to a scale of *income tax*.

I thus anticipated the requisite warning signal by proposing as early as 1936, with the “mirror stage,” a model that is already structural in essence, which recalled the true nature of the ego in Freud, namely: an imaginary identification, or more exactly, an enveloping series of such identifications.

Note for your purpose that I recall on this occasion the difference separating the image from the illusory (the “optical illusion” begins only with judgment; prior to that, it is a gaze objectivated in a mirror).

Heinz Hartmann, quite cultivated in such matters, was able to hear that call as early as the Marienbad Congress at which I issued it in 1936. But one is simply helpless against the attraction of diversifying the forms of the concentration camp: psychologizing ideology is one of them.

You philosophers don’t seem to me to need this register of my remarks unless Alain has not been sufficient for you.

Are you sufficiently edified to free me from answering as to the way to “get somebody to step out of his consciousness.” I am not Alphonse Allais, who would answer you: flay him.

It is not to his consciousness, that the subject is condemned, but to his body, which in many ways resists actualizing the division of the subject.

That such resistance has served to lodge all kinds of errors (including the soul) does not prevent that division from achieving effects of truth within it, such as what Freud discovered under the name over which his disciples still vacillate in assenting: castration.

## II. Psychoanalysis and Society

What is the relation between the subject of a revolutionary praxis aiming at going beyond its alienated labor and the subject of alienated desire?

What is, according to you, the theory of language implied by Marxism?

What do you think of the recent remark by Dr. Mannoni, who, speaking (at a recent meeting of institutional psychotherapists) of psychoanalytic therapy, characterized it as “the intervention of one institution within another institution.”

That raises the question of the social function of “mental illness” and of psychoanalysis. What is the social significance of the fact that the psychoanalyst must be paid by the analysand? Need psychoanalysis take into account the fact that it is a class therapy?

The subject of alienated desire — you mean no doubt what I articulate as: the desire of — is the desire of the Other, which is correct, with the sole modification that there is no subject of desire. There is the subject of the fantasy, that is: a division of the subject caused by an object, that is: stopped up by it, or more exactly, the object for which the category of cause occupies the place in the subject.

That object is the one lacking in philosophical consideration in order to situate itself, that is: in order to know that it is nothing.

That object is the one to which we come in psychoanalysis in that it leaps from its place, like a ball that escapes during the fray in order to score a goal on its own.

That is the object after which we run in psychoanalysis, even as we apply all conceivable awkwardness toward seizing it in theory.

It is only once the status of that object — the one I call “*petit a*,” and with which I have entitled my course this year as the object of psychoanalysis — has been acknowledged that we will be able to give a meaning to the alleged impetus you attribute to the subject’s revolutionary praxis of going beyond his alienated labor. In what way can one go beyond the alienation of his labor? It is as though you wanted to go beyond the alienation of discourse.

All I can see as transcending that alienation is the object sustaining its value, what Marx, in a homonym singularly anticipatory of psychoanalysis, called the fetish, it being understood that psychoanalysis reveals its biological significance.

Now, that causal object is the one whose regulated exclusion (*coupe*) assumes its ethical shape in the *embourgeoisement* which gives a planetary dimension to the fate of what is called in French, not without reason, *cadres* — white-collar workers.

See there a lineament of what might bring your question to the state of a rough sketch.

But in order to avoid any misunderstanding, note that I maintain that psychoanalysis does not have the slightest right to interpret revolutionary practice — which will be motivated further on — but that on the contrary, revolutionary theory would do well to hold itself responsible for leaving empty the function of truth as cause, when therein lies, nevertheless, the first supposition of its own effectiveness.

It is a matter of calling into question the category of dialectical materialism, and it is a matter of common knowledge that Marxists are not very adept at doing it, even though they are, on the whole, Aristotelians, which is already not too bad.

Only my theory of language as structure of the unconscious can be said to be implied by Marxism, if, that is, you are not more demanding than the material implication with which our most recent logic is satisfied, that is, that my

theory of language is true whatever be the adequacy of Marxism, and that it is needed by it, whatever be the defect that it leaves Marxism with.

So much for the theory of language implied logically by Marxism.

As for the one it has implied historically, I have barely but to offer you, given the modest limits of my information as to what goes on beyond a certain doctrinal curtain, thirty pages by Stalin that put an end to the frolics of *Marrism* (from the name of the philologist Marr, who considered language to be a “superstructure”).

Statements of rudimentary common sense concerning language and specifically concerning the point that it *is not* a superstructure, whereby the Marxist, on the subject of language, situates himself far above the logical positivist.

The least you can accord me concerning my theory of language is, should it interest you, that it is materialist.

The signifier is matter transcending itself in language. I leave you the choice of attributing that sentence to a Communist Bouvard or a Pecuchet exhilarated by the marvels of D.N.A.

For you would be wrong to think that I care enough about metaphysics to make a trip to meet it.

I have it at home, that is, in my practice where I entertain it in terms which allow me to answer you in lapidary fashion as to the social function of mental illness: its *social* function, as you in fact put it, is irony. When you have experienced a schizophrenic, you will know the irony that arms him, working at the root of every social relation.

When, however, the illness is neurosis, the irony misses its function, and it is Freud's find to have recognized it there nevertheless, in which manner he restored it therein to its full rights, which is tantamount to a cure of the neurosis.

Psychoanalysis has now taken over the role of neurosis: it has the same social function, but it too misses it. I attempt to reestablish irony with its rights, in which manner perhaps we too will cure the psychoanalysis of today.

That a psychoanalysis must be paid for does not imply that it is a class therapy, but the two things are all that remain of irony in it at present.

That may seem an overly ironic answer. If you reflect on it, it will certainly seem more authentic to you than if I had referred you to what I said above about the function of the fetish.

I see that I have left aside Mannoni, for failure to know exactly what it was that he said. We will find out shortly in *Les Temps modernes*.

### III. Psychoanalysis and Philosophy

To what extent can psychoanalysis account for philosophy and in what sense is it authorized to say that philosophy is paranoia (in an unpublished text by Freud commented on by Kaufmann)?

If illusion is the endpoint of sublimation, what is its relation to ideology? Is sublimation not a form of alienation?

Within the teaching of philosophy, how do you conceive of that of psychoanalysis?

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I have already said enough to be brief, for all this is giving me no pleasure.

That philosophy is a variety of paranoia is a variety of Freud's irony in its savage phase. It is certainly not by chance that Freud consigns it to the unpublished (the Alphonse Allais reference here, too, would not be out of place; we should not be surprised to encounter Kaufmann—who is familiar with irony—here).

I regret that you believe that sublimation is an illusion. The slightest reading of Freud would convince you that he says exactly the opposite.

Religion, yes, an illusion, says Freud, but that's because he sees a neurosis in it.

I don't know what can be expected from within the teaching of philosophy, but I have recently had an experience of it that has left me prey to a doubt: which is that psychoanalysis can contribute to what is called hermeneutics only by restoring philosophy to its links with obscurantism.<sup>2</sup>

For to depend on the economics of the matter, that is, on what is obscure (since at the same time, one prides oneself on not having had any experience of it) at the very moment that, as a philosopher, one should be confronting the stumbling of the subject is of the same order as the celebrated fantasy of the Rat Man, who placed two packets of shit on eyes which, as if by chance, were those of Anna Freud, the daughter of his psychoanalyst.

Thus would the philosopher operate in regard to truth when *it* runs the risk of seeing him in his particular poverty.

But all this is not that serious, and the religious aspirations in this case are sufficiently acknowledged for one to be able to say that psychoanalysis has no interest in it.

#### IV. Psychoanalysis and Anthropology

Can there be or is there a fundamental discipline that would account for the unity of the human sciences?

Can psychoanalysis serve as the basis for an anthropology?

2. The reference is to Paul Ricoeur, *De l'interprétation: essai sur Freud*, Paris, Seuil, 1965.

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The best anthropology can go no further than making of man the speaking being. I myself speak of a science defined by its object.

Now the subject of the unconscious is a *spoken* being, and that is the being of man; if psychoanalysis is to be a science, that is not a presentable object.

In point of fact, psychoanalysis refutes every idea heretofore presented of man. It should be said that all of them, however many there were, were no longer in touch with anything, even before psychoanalysis.

The object of psychoanalysis is not man; it is what he lacks — not an absolute lack, but the lack of an object. Even then agreement must be reached as to the lack in question — it is that which excludes the possibility of naming its object.

It is not to scarce bread, but to cake that the Queen sent her peoples in time of famine.

Therein lies the unity of the human sciences, if you like, which is to say that it provokes smiles if one fails to recognize in it the function of a limit.

It provokes smiles at a certain use of interpretation, as the sleight of hand of comprehension. An interpretation whose effects are understood is not a psychoanalytic interpretation. It is enough to have been analyzed or to be an analyst to realize that.

That is why psychoanalysis as a science will be structuralist, to the point of recognizing in science a refusal of the subject.

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