Psychoanalysis And Eschatology

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After the arrival of psychoanalysis, nothing has remained untouched by it, and this is even more the case if we add Freud's meta-psychological ambitions, which sought to explain even more broadly the phenomena present in the individual soul, such as culture, religion, art, etc. Theology in particular felt directly threatened by Freud's militant atheism. Despite this fact, however, I would still hazard saying that at the deeper level of ontological presuppositions and consequences, psychoanalysis has yet to receive proper theological treatment or be given sufficient interpretation.

Theological Hermeneutics and Depth Psychology[1]

A century after the publication of the first edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), it would merely be to repeat a truism to claim today that not only the method of investigation of psychoanalysis but also its terminology have come to permeate the whole of Western humanistic thought, a unique phenomenon in the intellectual history of the modern period. Despite initial objections, the new Freudian 'science' has proved to have established itself not only in the realm of experts but in the common perception of modern man about himself. The popularisation of psychoanalysis has already produced a veritable mythology about the soul, and it is not at all rare to hear terms taken from the first and second Freudian local description of the psyche thrown around in public as common sense and self-evident.

At the same time, much water has flown since then in the river once carved out by Freud. Many of his views have been reconsidered, and 'depth psychology' is now carried along countless new hermeneutical channels and 'schools', none of which can lay claim to very great success in their attempts to develop the 'science of the unconscious'. Of course, there has been no lack of attempts to 'return to Freud' and his 'holy' texts, usually of varying levels of inspiration and accompanied by radical hermeneutical revisions, either at the level of theory or of clinical practice, which is only natural given that the latter constitutes the goal of the former.

[1] A paper given at the International Conference 'Orthodox Theology and Psychotherapy' in Aliartos, Greece on 1–5 October 2003. Published in Greek, as part of my book *Psychoanalysis and Orthodox Theology: on Desire, Catholicity, and Eschatology*, (Αθήνα: Αρμός, 2003). Translated in English by Vincent DeWeese.

In the decades that have passed, theology and philosophy have shared the same ambivalence toward this new modern 'science'. Scholars in both disciplines have instinctually perceived that psychology was laying claim to domains that at one time or another belonged to their own authority—indeed, after the arrival of psychoanalysis, nothing has remained untouched by it, and this is even more the case if we add Freud's meta-psychological ambitions, which sought to explain even more broadly the phenomena present in the individual soul, such as culture, religion, art, etc. Theology in particular felt directly threatened by Freud's militant atheism, and from that time, beginning with the trials undergone by pastor Oscar Pfister at the hands of his superiors, clergy and theologians dealing with psychoanalysis have had to face not only their own personal internal conflicts, but also external doubts and persecution, which have continued until this very day. Despite this fact, however, I would still hazard saying that at the deeper level of ontological presuppositions and consequences, psychoanalysis has yet to receive proper theological treatment or be given sufficient interpretation—I mean with the sobriety that comes after either the enthusiasm of the newly converted to psychoanalysis or the horror of the fundamentalist before it has already passed.

Personally, for today's discussion I chose a philosophical path toward what is ultimately a theological hermeneutical encounter. I chose such a path because philosophical criticism is for many naturally more credible than theological criticism, which cannot but be perceived as fundamentally reactionary and consequently unreliable. A theological conversation, however, can take place afterwards on the basis of this philosophical critique; moreover, by first approaching the topic philosophically, we also help those who do not otherwise have the appropriate theological training or studies to follow this conversation.

Toward this end, I have selected three of the most important philosophical critics of psychoanalysis in the twentieth century: L. Wittgenstein, P. Ricoeur, and C. Castoriadis, because I consider their critiques to be complementary and ultimately most susceptible to theological hermeneutical engagement. To begin with, Wittgenstein represents perhaps the deepest philosophical criticism of psychoanalysis in the twentieth century, and one which has not received the attention it deserves, and thus the specialist literature on the subject has remained scant. To this day, the most important book published on the topic is perhaps that of Jacques Bouveresse, which in its English translation carries the very telling subtitle, *The Myth of the Unconscious*.[2] Wittgenstein's first critical objection has to do with the scientific character of psychoanalysis itself: the philosopher refuses to concede

[2] See J. Bouveresse, *Philosophie, mythologie et pseudo-science. Wittgenstein lecteur de Freud* (Paris: Editions de l'éclat, 1981). English translation by C. Cosman, *Wittgenstein reads Freud. The Myth of the Unconscious* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1995). See also Assoun, P.L., *Freud et Wittgenstein* (Paris: PUF, 1988). Cioffi, F., 'Wittgenstein's Freud', in *Studies in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, ed. Winch. McGuiness, B., 'Freud and Wittgenstein', in *Wittgenstein and His Times*, ed. McGuiness (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981).

even this much to Freud. That which psychanalysis has to offer is not *scientia* but *speculatio*—'something prior even to the formulation of a [scientific] hypothesis' (*Lectures and Conversations*, 44).[3] Freud's immense self-confidence, dogmatism, and faith in the existence of a single, unique explanation—namely, his own—leads him to constantly make generalisations based on one-dimensional personal interpretations: this is the definition, according to Wittgenstein, not of science, but of *mythology*[4]—a mythology intended to astonish and impress the bourgeois class of his time. Consequently, Freud cannot grasp within the violence of his interpretation either ethics, religion, or art in what Wittgenstein calls 'their transcendence'.[5] Moreover, in mythological fashion, the unconscious, though it constitutes the essence of the psyche, can in reality only be approached by means of the conscious mind.[6] As if fabricating a mythology, then, the unconscious 'is made into a being', as if it were a 'someone' who acts, thinks, desires, works, plays practical jokes, dreams, and makes verbal slips without the self being aware of it, but all while *completely conscious*, as an independent and autonomous entity.[7] Moreover, in a way that resembles aesthetics more than science, the interpretation of the life and constitution of this 'being' is carried out not objectively but through the *persuasion* of the analyst and the *consent* of the analysand.[8] In the same way, the unconscious mind is personified as a *homunculus*, to which 'personal' properties can be attributed, such as judgment, control, censorship, desire and other such qualities,[9] not to mention a remarkable facility with language. If, however, Wittgenstein continues, the unconscious truly speaks, then it follows the rules and codes of logic and language, and, consequently, it is not really 'unconscious' at all[10]—here a citation of Lacan would not be out of place.

Freud can be said to be acting as a philosopher, Wittgenstein claims, since he deems it sufficient to study a single case of hysteria and, from there, to abstract the entire structure of the human psyche.[11] Likewise, he deems it sufficient to base his hermeneutic scheme for dream interpretation on his insistence that dreams essentially constitute a form of disguised wish fulfilment. Generalising and universalising as a philosopher would, from a very small number of individual cases, and then adding the mythical prestige of the analyst, he offers a liberatingly arbitrary and dogmatically one-sided explanatory framework for interpreting dreams with the same eagerness that an archaeologist might interpret his findings. For Wittgenstein, conversely, the interpretation of dreams is instead that which is necessary here and now for me to find the inspiration to creatively construct a teleology of my

[3] Cited from the English edition of Wittgenstein's works edited by Bennett, Oxford.
[4] J. Bouveresse, *Wittgenstein reads Freud*…, *ibid*., 12–13.
[5] *Ibid*., 17.
[6] *Ibid*., 25.
[7] *Ibid*., 34–35.
[8] *Ibid*., 26–27.
[9] *Ibid*., 38–39.
[10] *Ibid*., 40.
[11] *Ibid.*, 45.

conscious activity.[12] Like in the case of free association, we are dealing with artistic material susceptible to varying interpretations—if dreams are a language as specific and translatable as Freud thinks, then, the philosopher claims, we should also be able to translate language into dreams.[13] In other words, the symbolism found in dreams must be approached with great caution and careful thought; Freud's positivism makes him try to compulsively seek out the supposedly true causes of behaviour at the very moment when the aim of therapy could not be absolute knowledge, but a deeper understanding of mental realities and the world. There cannot exist, Wittgenstein says, a positive science of motivations and mental causation, but only interpretation[14]—a multiplicity of possible interpretations—on the condition that we first suspend Freud's positivism and naturalism.

The problem of spoken 'unconscious' motives can be found precisely in this contradiction. In actual clinical practice, unconscious motives are discovered through personal explanation of causes; however, on another, meta-psychological level—which constitutes the core of psychoanalytic theory—these motives are considered to be emanations from a strictly constructed superstructure, which is rationally and even deterministically articulated and produces an almost metaphysically fixed causality. According to Wittgenstein, this is exactly Freud's worst prejudice or, better yet, a series of prejudices:[15] to begin with, his psychic determinism, as a metaphysical or mythological conviction that, supposedly, mental phenomena ought to be fully deterministic and explainable. Here Freud seems to be completely out of touch with the development of natural science in his own age, such as, for example, the theories of relativity and quantum indeterminacy. This first prejudice leads to the second, which consists in his faith that everything in mental life necessarily has a meaning, aim, or intention that can be understood through a few given principles, and then the third prejudice follows as a natural consequence: the conviction that an explanation that applies to a portion of the facts can explain the entire world of facts as a whole.

Wittgenstein accepts psychoanalysis as a form of persuasion and aesthetics, as hermeneutics and inspiration, as a contribution to the process of self-creation and self-awareness in a way that we would call *eschatological*, even though it is here without particular theological significance (in spite of its clear Biblical roots). In the same way, he can also accept the unconscious, as a fulfilment of the personal myth of the subject, while rejecting Freud's deterministic and positivistic 'science' and the deterministic psychic mechanism implied by it. I think that Wittgenstein would accept that Freud's great discovery was, as Erich Fromm puts it, the conflict between thought and existence, a conflict unacceptable and humiliating to 'modern' Western

[12] *Ibid*., 116.
[13] *Ibid*., 110.
[14] *Ibid*., 80.
[15] *Ibid*., 83–96.

man.[16] We owe to Fromm, too, a number of other insights, insofar as the integration of Freud's work into the Western intellectual tradition is concerned—something that we will return to later. Of course, Freud himself reduced the significance of his own discovery by believing that this conflict was fundamentally a clash between thought and childhood sexuality—since it was precisely sexuality that was repressed in his time and social class. The philosophically idiosyncratic founder of psychoanalysis would hardly have been unable to generalise on any other basis, believing that whatever happened in the Vienna of his time was valid for all time periods of human existence. Whatever the case may be, for Wittgenstein, the only prospects for psychoanalysis could be found as a theory of aesthetics or hermeneutics.

It is exactly on this point that we can now engage with the thought of our next philosophical guest, Ricoeur.[17] Our French philosopher seeks, by connecting Freud with Hegel, to situate psychoanalysis within a philosophical perspective in which the unconscious meets and irrigates the conscious mind. What is essential here is an 'intersubjective relativity', which is created during analysis. My unconscious is something that I possess for another; it is the conscious mind of the other that reveals through its interpretation the content of my own unconscious, in the process of our common search for meaning.[18] The unconscious is not an objective and independent 'being' or *homunculus*, Ricoeur says (implicitly perhaps following the thought of Wittgenstein), but is rather constituted precisely by this intersubjective act of interpretation and dialogue—the unconscious is an intersubjective reality, not a thinking 'being', but a web of hermeneutical intersubjective relationships. But this brings to the fore the extreme incompleteness of Freud's hermeneutic since new spheres must now enter into the 'construction' of the unconscious besides the sexual: for example, the sphere of the workspace and of the acquisition of goods, that of power and its aims and ambitions, that of values and their formulation in common with others.[19]

In this way, therefore, the unconscious comes into contact with the conscious mind. If the conscious mind is connected with creation and history and aims at the fullness and complete development of the person's powers within a personal eschatological perspective of human perfection, then the unconscious is the first principle, the source, the yet unrefined meaning and, in this way, an impersonal fate as simply the 'other' of the conscious mind. The intersubjective refining of this primitive meaning is absolutely indispensable so that the eschatological perfection of the conscious mind is not a naïve self-deception, but an authentic, meaning-giving event for the real, suffering, traumatised, and often existentially floundering human being, a real illumination of his mental darkness rather than a foolish and dreamlike

[16] In E. Fromm's work, *Greatness and Limitations of Freud's thought*, 1980. In the Greek translation, *Το Μεγαλείο και οι Περιορισμοί στη Σκέψη του Freud* (Athens, 1983), 39.

[17] We are using here the essay of P. Ricoeur, 'Consciousness and the Unconscious', in his book, *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Illinois: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1996).

[18] P. Ricoeur, *ibid*., 106–108.

[19] *Ibid*., 110–112.

narcissistic pseudo-ecstasy. Ricoeur comes very close to doing theology here. If the unconscious mind represents for the conscious mind an intersubjective process of creating authentic meaning and perfecting the fullness of that which man really is (as an icon of God, in theological language), then this process is identical with that which the Orthodox tradition has named—not, of course, ethics, but *ascesis*, or, if you wish, as I dared to call it recently, 'apophatic ethics'[20] (because this is what I think *asceticism* is). This is an ethics of the Other, a description of the infinite modes of freedom with which the human being encounters and assimilates the grace of the free and loving God, by introducing continuously and without end the miracle of the contingent particular person into his eschatological becoming, which constitutes his own particular and unrepeatable intersubjective 'essence'. If the unconscious mind is understood as intersubjective, ascetically accomplished meaning, which in the end becomes 'consciousness', then it ultimately serves as a guarantee of authentic eschatology, in the purely theological sense of the word.

We must, however, take yet another short break here from theology in order to return to philosophy as we promised at the beginning and, this time, to the philosophy of Castoriadis, so that we can finish our treatment of the issue at hand. By doing so, we hope to highlight the fundamental issues that only a philosopher who was also a psychoanalyst could raise regarding classical psychoanalysis. For Castoriadis, the deepest paradox or contradiction within Freudianism emerges from the way in which, on the one hand, Freud stresses the creative breadth of the psyche, expounding on the role of imagination and the possibility of self-recreation and, on the other hand, how he also tries to formulate a deterministic and rationalistic theory or science to explain the workings of that same psyche.[21] Psychoanalysis is an opportunity for self-transformation, not by thought alone, but by a poetic-practical activity, as the philosopher calls it,[22] a creation of the self by the self, as a new beginning for its history within a realm of potentialities[23]—not so much as a personal philosophy but as a form of meaning, of 'enmattered', vital reasons.[24] The past is transformed from fate into a kind of eschatological creation and an opening into the truth of communion,[25] into a liberation (of the Enlightenment kind).

I am not at all convinced that Castoriadis ever liberated anyone in this way, but I do find it interesting how this ultimately 'eschatological' understanding of psychoanalysis brings to the surface (paradoxically) its unconscious *biblical* roots…

[20] Fr N. Loudovikos, 'Η Αποφατική Ηθική και η Εκκλησιολογία του Ομοουσίου Κεφάλαια για την ηθική εξατομίκευση στην Ορθόδοξη Εκκλησία', in the volume *Σύναξις Ευχαριστίας, Χαριστήρια εις τιμήν του Γέροντος Αιμιλιανού* (Αθήνα: Ίνδικτος, 2003), 555–80.

[21] C. Castoriadis, Les Carrefours du Labyrinthe, Greek transl. Τα Σταυροδρόμια του Λαβυρίνθου (Αθήνα: Ύψιλον, 1991).

[22] C. Castoriadis, *ibid*., 45.

[23] *Ibid*., 69.

[24] *Ibid*., 63.

[25] *Ibid*., 100–101.

Indeed, important books have been written about Freud's 'Hebraism'.[26] Despite his formal rejection of the Jewish religion, it continued to exert an influence over him, even if just below the surface. The biblical roots of psychoanalysis, of course, did not affect its founder's naïve positivism and materialism, nor did it touch his patriarchal bourgeois mindset, which saw the other, and woman in particular, as an 'erotic object' outside of the self, an object to be possessed and in which, in bourgeois fashion, 'I invest' my libido and likewise divest from later on. Moreover, these biblical roots influenced quite a bit the ideal of *control* (the keyword here) over the instinctual urges by the now legendary psychic Ego through the Superego;[27] as can be seen, we are still dealing here with the Cartesian and Kantian transcendental punctual self, which is all-powerful and exercises control over the whole world. While the discovery of the unconscious shakes the very foundations of this imaginary, narcissistic omnipotence, Freud's intention was still *control* over the unconscious, to find the best possible fortification for the sovereignty of the Ego over the unconscious: 'there where the Id finds itself, the Ego must reach' according to his well-known formulation.

Despite all this, in a very theological manner, Freud's human being is thought to have an ultimate end, a purpose, a capacity for eschatological fullness, a paradise of meaning, a restoration from the ancestral sin, which is expressed very vividly in his concept of the 'death instinct' (*destrudo*), which usually is taken to be incomprehensible by those who study Freud without having a theological background.[28] Naturally, Freud presents God as the sadistic Father of the uprooted Hebrew in exile, and he shows an ambivalence toward him that is extremely tense, verging on murderous. At least in theory, however, there exists a happy ending to analysis, where the instincts re-find their meaning, and the unconscious—now subjugated—becomes a source of enrichment: Jerusalem is re-inhabited and the happiness of the city of God makes up for the pain of its long wandering in neurosis. As Rice shows us, Freud returns again symbolically to the Father, now reconciled with his world.

Strangely enough, psychoanalysis is, in its essence, a *sui genesis* eschatology construed along biblical lines, and this is why it cannot be a positive science but an interpretive art and aesthetic, as Wittgenstein, another Jewish genius, understood so well. Only in this way can it surpass the constraints of its founder's determinist positivism, materialism, and atheism. Psychoanalysis cannot offer any positive, independent knowledge about the soul, but it can help open the latter to meaning. It can help the human being in cooperation with another human being pose the question of his ultimate end, the question of the end times, and, in that redeeming light, to

[26] The most important of the recent books published on this topic is perhaps that of Emm. Rice, *Freud and Moses. The long journey Home* (NY: State Univ. of N.Y. Press, 1990).

[27] E. Fromm, *Greatness and Limitations*, 19–23.

[28] Fromm is himself an example of this unease in the face of Freud's 'death drive', which he too rejects precisely on account of it being rationally incomprehensible (*ibid*., 150).

reread his life. The countless 'schools' of depth psychology are all ways of speaking forth this meaning, which like the being in Aristotle 'is said in many ways' (*λέγεται πολλαχῶς*)[29] and mainly through the psychopathological symptom.

In what way then, someone could perhaps ask, is psychoanalysis different from philosophy? Does the fact that psychoanalysis is not a positive science deprive it completely of its scientific character? Equally fascinating is another question: in what way, then, does psychoanalysis differ from theology?

The answer that I would personally be inclined to give may seem provocative to many: psychoanalysis seems to be at its base a former philosophy that wishes to become a theology, and herein lies its fundamental 'scientific character'. I would define this scientific character precisely as the intuition or hypothesis, expressed in the empirical realism of analysis, that this mythical 'being' that is called the unconscious, which corresponds in the anthropological model of transcendental idealism to the 'mythical other' that is required next to the mythical detached conscious mind, can become a real experience of authenticity. I think that perhaps Lacan understood this better than Freud, and Jung perhaps better than anyone else. We cannot discuss this issue within the limits of our talk today, but I think that it is exactly this 'theological' nostalgia for empirical authenticity that provides psychoanalysis with the quality of empirical science, and I would add, similarly, the nostalgia for the fertile indeterminacy of the person, toward which any interpretation of the unconscious is always ultimately working. The unconscious, when understood within a truly intersubjective hermeneutic, becomes a condition for existential authenticity; it is transformed from a mythical 'being' into the given real, living material of active encounter. Here philosophical intersubjectivity can be transformed into a 'theological' ascesis of communion—something that, of course, greatly exceeds Freud's conscious intentions.

The whole difficulty with psychoanalysis resides in the fact that if one does not understand the theological roots of its scientific character, if one is not aware of this and, even more so, if one denies it outright, then psychoanalysis risks being left in ontological limbo and returning awkwardly to its philosophical past (positivistic, deterministic, and rationalistic). Because when we say that psychoanalysis can be scientific only insofar as it is 'theological', this means that it can operate *anti-metaphysically* and *anti-ideologically* only by surpassing philosophy, metaphysical theology, as well as pseudoscientific mythology, and by putting itself at the service of 'Being to come', the eschatological Being-in-becoming of the person.

Of course, I am now speaking about a consciously theological approach to psychoanalysis and its companion, depth psychology. As we say, there cannot exist a distinctively Christian physics or mathematics, even though a robust Christian worldview can provide a direction and a framework for scientific investigation[30]

[29] See Fr N. Loudovikos, 'Η Αποφατική Ηθική…', 557.

[30] See Fr N. Loudovikos, 'Οντολογικές και Κοσμολογικές Συναντήσεις Θεολογίας και Φυσικών

(although we do not often think of this). Psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, however, unlike physics, can both consciously approach theological experience simply by searching out their own empirical and anti-ideological or anti-metaphysical foundations—elements which of course, we should note, we also encounter in great part in the writing and experience of the Greek Fathers. If psychoanalysis and psychotherapy do not enter into dialogue with theology, it will be much more difficult for them, lacking a cultural or spiritual reference point, to justify their biblical eschatological roots—which Freud was the first to betray—and very strangely, they will lose the important guiding thread that could render the hermeneutics of psychoanalysis empirically realistic, albeit without conforming at all to positivistic conceptions of the 'scientific'.

The achievements of depth psychology will remain incomplete as long as it remains in its 'pre-theological' stage, and these achievements will receive new corroboration as soon as psychoanalysis begins to gradually enter into its 'theological' stage (which will require rejecting many elements of a purely Freudian anthropology). Here, Orthodox psychoanalysts can perhaps play an important role.

Επιστημών', in *Αναλόγιο*, 5 (2003): 128-137.