

Heidegger and Psychoanalysis?*

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Abstract: This paper examines the possible relationship between the thought of Martin Heidegger as it emerges in the *Zollikon Seminaire* (1959-1969) through his exchange with Medard Boss and the perspective of psychoanalysis as it appears through the prism of Jacques Lacan's rereading of Freud. Heidegger takes Freud to be victim of a positivist conception of science that seeks to explain pathological human behaviour by a complex of consciously discernible causes. When certain phenomena cannot be explained in this way, Freud postulates a set of psychic causes that are not conscious, the sum total of which he calls the "unconscious." Since all human phenomena are, for Heidegger, discernible through a thorough-going phenomenology of human being (Dasein) as being-in-the-world, Freud's hypothetical construct is unnecessary and, in the long run, pernicious. But Lacan proposes a new way to understand the unconscious that Freud discovered, namely, that it is not to be thought of as analogous to a physical system of hydraulic forces but rather to a process that is structured like a language. The question raised in the paper is whether or not Heidegger would have been equally hostile to Freud's hypothesis, if it had been presented to him in

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Lacanian fashion as something “structured like a language”. The paper suggests that the answer could be “probably not”. On the basis of a highly simplified clinical example, it endeavors to show the compatibility between certain basic Heideggerean concepts and several of those essential to Lacan, especially the notions of truth and freedom.

Key-words: Heidegger, Lacan, language, positivism, metaphysics.

Resumo: Este ensaio examina o relacionamento possível entre o pensamento de Martin Heidegger enquanto emerge no *Zollikon Seminaire* (1959-1969) na sua troca de idéias com Medard Boss e a perspectiva da psicanálise como aparece através do prisma da releitura de Freud oferecido por Jacques Lacan. Heidegger entende Freud como vítima de uma compreensão positivista da ciência que procura explicar o comportamento humano patológico por um complexo de causas discerníveis conscientemente. Quando determinados fenômenos não podem ser explicados desta maneira, Freud postula um jogo de causas psíquicas que não são conscientes, cuja soma ele chama o “inconsciente”. Desde que todos os fenômenos humanos são, para Heidegger, discerníveis via uma profunda fenomenologia do ser humano (Dasein) como o ser-no-mundo, a construção hipotética de Freud é desnecessária e, a longo prazo, perniciosa. Mas Lacan propõe uma nova maneira de compreender o inconsciente descoberto por Freud, a saber, que não deve ser entendido como um sistema físico de forças hidráulicas, mas como um processo que seja estruturado como um idioma. A pergunta levantada neste ensaio é se Heidegger seria ou não igualmente hostil à hipótese de Freud, apresentada a ele dentro da forma de Lacan, como algo “estruturado como um idioma”. O ensaio sugere que a resposta poderia ser “provavelmente não”. Baseado num exemplo clínico altamente simplificado, este ensaio esforça-se para mostrar a compatibilidade entre determinados conceitos básicos de Heidegger e diversos, de Lacan, em especial as noções da verdade e da liberdade.

Palavras-chave: Heidegger, Lacan, linguagem, positivismo, metafísica.

Martin Heidegger was no friend of psychoanalysis. His first serious exposure to it came through the ministrations of Medard Boss (Craig 1988), who, in effect, introduced him to Freud. Mediated through Boss' own attempt to rethink Freud's insights in what he called *Daseinsanalysis*, Heidegger's relation to Freud himself remained cool, to say the least. Several attempts in the 1950's to entice him into dialogue with the so-called "French Freud", Jacques Lacan, whose self-proclaimed "return to Freud" some found deeply consonant with certain themes of Heidegger, proved fruitless. Given this record, any new attempt to find philosophical relevance for psychoanalysis in the thought of Martin Heidegger seems ill-starred indeed. And yet...

More must be said even to understand the problems involved. First of all, who was Medard Boss (1903-1990)? And how did he find his way from Freud to Heidegger (1889-1976) in the first place? A Swiss physician and psychiatrist, he felt that the psychiatric training he had received proved inadequate to prepare him to deal with the kind of clinical cases he had to face. To be sure, no one but Boss would call his training inadequate. He had been trained in psychiatry by Eugen Bleuler (1857-1939) at Zurich's mental hospital and university clinic, Burghölzli. He had begun his psychoanalysis of thirty-odd sessions with an ailing Freud in 1925, finished it with Karen Horney in Berlin. He had been exposed to the teaching and supervision of Theodor Reik, Hanns Sachs, Otto Fenichel, Ernest Jones among others, and had participated for ten years in a biweekly seminar with Carl G. Jung. After all that, he turned to the ancient wisdom of India for light – even tried to learn Hindi for this purpose. But then he fell upon *Being and Time*, Heidegger's master work of 1927. There he discovered Heidegger's analysis of human being (Dasein). From then on, Boss' commitment to the consequences of this discovery became total.

The earliest record we have of the relationship between the two men is a letter dating from 1947. Heidegger had been suspended from his teaching responsibilities by the ongoing denazification process, and

the only published work we have from that period is the “Letter on ‘Humanism’” written in response to Jean Beaufret’s questions from Paris two years earlier. When Boss requested permission to visit Heidegger that summer, we may presume that Heidegger welcomed the stimulus that would come from another inquiring mind from another country and from another discipline. At any rate, the two men – fourteen years apart in age – hit it off famously and became fast friends. Eventually they would vacation together with their wives – visiting Italy, Sicily, the Aegean Islands, and Greece – or sometimes they would simply take a work-vacation together, one week at a time, in Boss’s getaway home at Lenzerheide in the Alps near Davos. Boss learned much from their conversations, of course, and finally decided that his experience of Heidegger, the thinker, should be shared with others. Heidegger agreed, then, to lead a few seminars, so several times each semester for the next ten years he would spend a week or so in Zurich offering two three-hour sessions each time to 50-70 psychiatrists, most of them relatively innocent of philosophy of any kind, most of all his own.

What does Heidegger do in these seminars? In a word, he offers psychiatrists a crash course in some of the fundamental concepts of *Being and Time* that had first fired Boss’s enthusiasm. And who was more capable than he to do it? Those concepts by now are current coin and easily recalled. Heidegger is interested in the meaning of Being (*Sein*) as different from beings (*Seiende*) that it lets be manifest, and he proceeds by a phenomenological examination of a particular being among the rest, namely, human being that he calls *Dasein*. *Dasein* must somehow know the answer to the question about the meaning of Being as different from beings, inasmuch as it is able to ask it. Under examination, *Dasein* reveals itself as a phenomenon whose nature is to-be-in-the-world. Heidegger examines first what is meant by world and then what it means to be “in” such world. As for the world itself, it is to be understood not as the sum total of everything that is but as a horizon within which beings are

encountered, a matrix of relations interior to which beings have their meaning. Eventually this matrix of meanings would be conceived of as a matrix, of whatever can be articulated through speech.

For Dasein to be “in” such a world implies several different existential, i.e., structural, components: one that discloses/projects the world as total meaningfulness (*Verstehen*: “understanding”), another that discloses beings within the world through affective disposition (*Befindlichkeit*: “state of mind”), and still another that permits Dasein to articulate in speech what it affectively understands. This last component Heidegger calls *Rede*, but since *Rede* is his translation of the Greek *lógos* it seems better simply to anglicize the Greek, hence, call it “logos” – understanding thereby the structural component through which Dasein is able to let something be manifest in words. As a structural component, logos shares Dasein’s nature as Being-with-others, and this is the foundation of its capacity to interact with other Daseins through the mediation of speech (*Mitteilung*: “communication”). It goes without saying, of course, that the structural component of logos shares in the radically temporal character of Dasein, whereby in advancing resolve Dasein lets the future come through its past, letting beings (including itself) become manifest in the present. The implications of all this are as far-reaching as the phenomenology, which justifies it, is complex.

What does Heidegger do, then, with the psychiatrists? He follows the advice he gives Boss as Boss prepares to be a Visiting Professor at Harvard: “You must succeed in bringing about a change of viewpoint in your auditors, in awakening [in them] the sense in which the question [about Being in its difference from beings] must be asked” (2001, 258/324). He recommends a meditation on space and spatiality as a good way to start, and that is exactly how he begins these seminars. The analysis of space (and eventually time) add nothing but a certain freshness to the treatment of the issues in *Being and Time*. What is interesting is the rigor of his pedagogical method. Sessions proceed with homely examples of

cups and tables. Are they here? Or there? Or where? Are they now? Or then? Or when? What is where? What is when? It is very Socratic, and tough-minded – but lucidly clear and genuinely philosophical.

More particularly, what is to be said about the unconscious as Freud has taught us to understand it? For Heidegger, Freud is a classic example of the modern (broad sense) scientific mind, a mind that is totally oblivious to the Being-dimension of the objects it deals with, i.e., the mysterious process within them that lets them come to presence and reveal themselves to us as what they are. The scientific mind is interested in their object-character, their objectifiability, their capacity to be conceptualized in representations, measured, calculated, controlled. Heidegger finds the historical paradigm for this mentality jointly in the physics of Galileo and the philosophy of Descartes.

Heidegger takes the poor doctors through the long history that follows as a way of gaining a perch from which to say what he thinks about Freud's notion of the unconscious. The fact is that it was Boss who introduced Heidegger to Freud's metapsychological work and, according to Boss, Heidegger "couldn't believe that such an intelligent man could write such stupid things, such fantastical things, about men and women". What Freud is looking for is an explanation of human phenomena through an unbroken chain of causality (2001, 7/7). When he cannot do this on the level of consciousness, he postulates an unconscious – at best a pure hypothesis (2001, 169/214). Result: the "fatal distinction between conscious and unconscious" (2001, 254/319) is born and, alas, seems here to stay.

To stay? Well, if the Freudian unconscious is only the underside of a Cartesian conception of consciousness, conceived as an encapsulated ego-subject, what happens if this Cartesian model is scrapped? Does not the unconscious go too? Of course it does – and that is exactly Heidegger's position. For Dasein is not fundamentally an ego-subject. Dasein is the clearing of Being in which all beings (including itself) may appear and reveal themselves as what they are. That is why for Dasein to exist "means

to hold open a domain through its power to receive/perceive (*Vernehmen-können*) the meaningfulness of those [things] that are given to [Dasein] and relate to [Dasein] in virtue of [Dasein's] own luminosity" (2001, 4/4). Heidegger often describes this dwelling in the clearing as a "sojourn" or *Aufenthalt*.

In another register, this "sojourn" is a function of the existential structures already delineated in *Being and Time*, still remarkably functional in Heidegger's thought in the 1960s. For example:

Thrownness and *understanding* belong reciprocally together in a correlation whose unity is determined through *language* [*Sprache*]. Language here is to be thought of as saying [*Sagen*], in which beings as beings, i.e., from the viewpoint of their Being, show themselves. Only on the ground of the correlation of thrownness and understanding through language as saying is mankind able to be addressed by beings. (2001, 139-140/182-83)

Language, then, not simply in the sense of communication (*Mitteilung*) (2001, 139/183) or even of the verbal articulation (*Verlautbarung*) (2001, 185/232) but in the sense of saying (*Sagen*) is essentially a showing forth (*zeigen*), or rather a letting show forth (*sich zeigen lassen*) or be seen (*sehen lassen*) of the beings one encounters within the World *as* beings (2001, 90, 96-97/117, 126). And the reverse is also true: "every phenomenon shows itself [to the phenomenologist] only in the domain of language" (2001, 96-7/83).

All of this put together adds up to the conception of Dasein as a self. For Heidegger, the word stands for Dasein as Being-in-the-world insofar as it remains the same through a given historical process. Its permanence consists in the fact that "the self can always come back to itself and find itself in its sojourn still the same" [as it has always been up to now] (2001, 220).

What does the word "I" add to the experience of historicizing Dasein as a self? This is not of itself a testimony to consciousness but

simply the naming of the self as it is experienced by itself at any given moment. “For the Greeks, ‘I’ is the name for a human being (*Mensch*) that adjusts to the limits [of a given situation] and, thus at home with himself (*bei sich selbst*), is *Himself*” (2001, 188/235). To become “conscious” in such a condition will mean trying to determine “how this original being-intimate-with (*Sein bei*) [other beings]... hangs together with other determinations of *Dasein*” (2001, 110/143). And consciousness as such? “Standing within the clearing [of Being] does not mean that human being stands in the light like a post, but the human *Da-sein* *takes up a sojourn* in the clearing and ‘concerns’ itself with things” (2001, 144/188). As for an *unconscious*, then, if this is to be understood as no more than an unbroken chain of psychic causality that by hypothesis accounts for the gaps in conscious experience, it is no wonder that Heidegger will have no part of it. But is that the only way to understand the nature of Freud’s discovery?

Certainly the answer has to be “no”. For we have now another reading of Freud that neither Heidegger nor Boss took account of, that of Jacques Lacan. For Lacan, what Freud discovered in the unconscious was not an unbroken chain of psychic causality but the hidden power of speech, which is structured not like a thermodynamic machine but like a language. If Freud’s thinking had been clearly presented to Heidegger in these Lacanian terms, would he still have been so hostile to it?

I put the matter that way, because during the fifties a strong effort was made in France to arrange a dialogue between these two lions that did not quite work. Note Heidegger’s comment to Boss after the receipt of Lacan’s *Écrits*: “For my part, I am not yet ready to read the obviously baroque text. I am told, however, that it is causing the same kind of stir in Paris as (in its time) Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*” (2001, 279/348). Later (1967), after receiving a letter from Lacan, he comments: “I think the psychiatrist needs a psychiatrist” (2001, 281/350). However that may be, Lacan, the psychoanalyst, was certainly interested in Heidegger, at least in the early part of his teaching career. In the famous “Discourse at Rome” of 1953, “The Function and Field of Language and

Speech in Psychoanalysis” (1977, 30-113) (considered by most the *Magna Charta* of his future work), the allusion to Heidegger is explicit. For example, when discussing memory, Lacan observes: “in Heideggerian language one could say that [two]types of recollection constitute the subject as *gewesend* – that is to say as being the one who thus has been” and he gladly makes his own Heidegger’s famous formula about “being-unto-death”.

Eventually, Lacan would back away from this mode of expression but he acknowledges to the end that Heidegger’s work, in particular his conception of language, was “propaedeutic” to his own. In fact Lacan translated personally into French Heidegger’s landmark essay on the *Logos* of Heraclitus (1956) where Being, under the guise of Heraclitus’ *Logos*, is interpreted as language itself in its origins, the aboriginal Logos. As I understand Heidegger’s development, this is where it becomes clear that the language problematic of the later period is simply the natural complement to the conception of logos as an existential component of Dasein in *Being and Time*, i.e., after the so-called “turning” (*Kebrre*) in his thought. It is this essay of Heidegger on Heraclitus that permits Lacan to claim an ally in Heidegger when he says that human beings do not speak language but language speaks them.

When Lacan makes this claim that language speaks the human subject, it is obviously the symbolic order to which he is referring as Other than the subject. There is no need to recall here that Lacan’s conception of this Other of language derives from Saussure; that the principles of the unconscious governing of dream formation discovered by Freud (e.g., displacement and condensation) follow the same pattern as the laws of metonymy and metaphor in linguistics as discovered by Saussure’s disciple, Roman Jakobson; or that Lacan uses such facts to justify his claim that the unconscious discovered by Freud, is structured like a language. There is no need, either, to insist here that these laws – or rather *the* Law – are not abstractions but are inscribed in human culture itself and determine the subject through signifying chains forged by one’s ancestral past, family history, social milieu and, as times goes on, the

record of one's own personal odyssey as its frustrated desire searches for some kind of lost object through the mediation of language.

The subject of psychoanalysis, then, is for Lacan the linguistic subject. Linguists like Benveniste distinguish two modes of subject: the spoken subject, i.e., the subject of the spoken word as spoken that remains as part of the spoken discourse; and the speaking subject that recedes in the very act of speaking. It is the latter that for Lacan is the subject of our parapraxes, lapses, dreams, etc., i.e., the unconscious as itself the subject that sabotages beyond our control what we consciously intend to say and do.

All this was clear to Lacan by 1953, so if two years later he took time out of a busy teaching and clinical schedule to personally translate Heidegger's *Logos* essay, one has to surmise that he felt that this essay supported his case. In a way it certainly does. For Lacan, the id of Freud (the *Es* of *Wo Es war soll ich werden*) translates as *ça: ça pense, ça parle*. For Heidegger: *die Sprache spricht. C'est ça!* For both, language speaks the human thing. For Heidegger, Being-as-*Logos*, in Dasein as its clearing, speaks through beings, inviting Dasein to let them be seen as what they are by bringing them into words. For Lacan, the process is less poetic. For the symbolic order is a chain of signifiers that refer less to corresponding individual signifieds (as they did for Saussure) than they refer to one another and as such produce as an effect the subject of language. In the words of Benveniste: "It is... literally true that the foundation of subjectivity is in the exercise of language" (Benveniste 1972, 262ff). And Lacan:

The effect of language is the cause introduced into the subject. By this effect [the subject] is not cause of itself, for its cause is the signifier without which there would not be any subject in the real. But this subject is what the signifier represents, and it could not represent anything except for another signifier. (1966, 835)

To be sure, there is a causality here, but in terms of the efficacy of language, not in the order of thermodynamically styled psychic energy.

What are we to infer from all this? Clearly remaining in the Cartesian tradition to the extent that he calls a human being a subject at all, Lacan in no way conceives of this subject as an encapsulated ego of consciousness. As subject of the unconscious, it dwells in what we may think of as intersubjective space, in the domain of social discourse (*le lien social*), the locus of the Other. Does this mean that Lacan and Heidegger are saying the same thing? Certainly not!

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Surely the two conceptions cannot be conflated, but can they throw any light on each other? My claim is that they can. At any rate, to test the clinical viability of these inevitably abstract parameters in a life-blood context, I propose to let them serve as general background for a brief reflection upon how the “talking cure” works... when it works. Highly simplified for heuristic reasons, the following record recounts the initial stages of treatment of a fifteen year old adolescent who was brought to the therapist by her mother very much against her will, I shall call her “Jennifer”. This case (Simmoney 2001) is cited with permission almost *verbatim*. Simonney’s name for the patient is “Cherifa” for reasons that the full text makes clear, but since this part of his text does not concern us, I have changed her name to “Jennifer” as being more familiar to the Anglo-Saxon ear.

Jennifer had suffered from insulin-dependent diabetes since the age of six. She must follow a strict diet and give herself regular insulin injections. Because she does not respect her diet, nor does she take her insulin regularly, the medical doctors became especially concerned when she began to have frequent fainting spells. She consulted with three different psychologists, all of whom urged obedience to the doctors’ orders, claiming that these orders were only for her own good. The mother, too, became increasingly anxious, fighting constantly with her daughter in a futile effort to force her to follow medical advice. Exhausted by the struggle, the mother finally brought Jennifer to the psychotherapist, her sullen countenance testifying eloquently to her recalcitrance.

The therapist in this case was a psychoanalyst. What could he offer Jennifer that medical doctors, psychologists and an anxious mother could not?¹ Psychoanalysis would be something that the standard therapies, whether physical, biochemical, psychological or purely cognitive would, in principle, formally ignore: access to what Freud called the “unconscious”. It is common knowledge now that this for Freud was the system of psychic processes functioning outside of conscious awareness that determine, or at least radically influence, conscious human behavior and account for many forms of illness that have come to be called “mental”. It was the existence of just such a system that came to be dubbed, after one famous patient of Breuer, the “talking” cure; the method Freud devised for dealing with it he called “psychoanalysis”. Reduced to the barest of bones, psychoanalysis consisted in: 1) a method (“free association” by the subject, saying “whatever comes to mind”) in conjunction with a corresponding free floating attentiveness on the part of a listener; 2) a technique for interpreting thereby the unconscious desire of the subject; and 3) the galvanizing of both of these in what Freud called “transference” – that unique electricity between analysand and analyst through which the subject can experience the functioning of those psychic structures, however repressed or infantile, that sabotage the subject’s conscious thinking and acting.

The centrality of language in this, the foundational experience of Freud’s entire enterprise, will explain why Jacques Lacan, in his celebrated “return to Freud”, found the laws of structural linguistics a better paradigm with which to conceptualize the workings of the unconscious than the laws of mechanics on which Freud relied. The whole process of psychoanalysis is reducible to the talking of the subject to an analyst who listens – hence the etiquette “talking cure”. But what makes it therapeutic? First a bit of case history.

¹ It is worth noting that no mention is made of consultation with a psychiatrist. Is this because the medical doctors were under the impression that a psychiatrist, being a physician like themselves, would only offer one more pharmacological recommendation that Jennifer would automatically reject?

Quest

The mother remarried and has had a son with her second husband. Jennifer gets along well with her stepfather. On the other hand, she does not want to see her own father, nor even speak with him on the phone. She explained her refusal in the following terms: her father, who is himself a diabetic, had hidden his disease from her mother who only learned of it after the girl's birth. He used to get up at night to give himself his insulin shots, which he kept hidden in the refrigerator. We might well wonder how the mother could remain blind to such maneuvers on his part [but that's the story as told].

The girl does not forgive [her father] for bringing her into the world with such a handicap as diabetes, so the father figure is [radically] marked [for her] with the seal of death... We should add that her aggressiveness towards her mother also stems from her resentment, more or less explicitly expressed, that her mother could have given birth to her in such circumstances, She does not forgive the mother her blindness with regards to the father's disease.

At the end of the first consultation, the mother gave me [i.e., the therapist] the addresses of the doctors who were treating the girl and asked me to get in touch with them. I told her that there was no hurry to do so, and that, if I needed to do so, I would speak about it with Jennifer first. I also said that Jennifer might be suffering from the heavy burden of her medical care.

Then, once alone with the girl, I explained the rules [of the treatment]: she was to come every week, to speak with me freely about whatever came into her head. As for me, I promised her that whatever she said to me would remain between us: confidential.

The second session arrived. Jennifer came looking extremely pleased, in marked contrast with the time before; and she told me how much she appreciated my not contacting her doctors. She added that she had already seen three different psychologists each of whom had been constantly in touch with her doctors, repeating to her that she had to take care of herself, an attitude which had been unbearable for her because it made her feel completely trapped.

She added that her mother's behavior was a source of pain for her, that her mother harassed her for not following her treatment, even going so far as to scold her in public and "to say everything in front of everybody." She added that "it's humiliating for a child to be scolded in public, and that's why I no longer take my medicine".

I think it is hardly necessary to insist on the importance of that last statement which, in some ways, gives, if not the only key, at least one of the important keys to the symptom of Jennifer's refusal to accept health care. It is fitting to underline her use of the word "child," which, though she is no longer really a child, points to an infantile and old source of her disorder. In reaction to her mother's reprimands, which shows to the eyes of the world the bad daughter who does not want to be cured, might we not think that Jennifer, on the contrary, is seeking to expose her disease in much the same way as someone who would reveal a family secret, this secret being the mystery of her conception, set between the paternal lie and the maternal blindness. By exposing her illness, she is asking herself what unfathomable enjoyment (*jouissance*), with death hovering in the shadows, ruled over her birth. Her mother's reprimands along with the doctors' place the fault on her; she is the guilty one. Here we see the

[position of victim], where she suffers for two reasons: from her sickness and from the reprimands for being a bad patient. The situation is blocked, since the thing she is exposing through her symptom is not recognized. Consequently, she experiences all the care given her as a way of hushing up the truth she is trying to express.

And there, or perhaps one should say, beginning from there, the analyst, by not being totally associated with the medical discourse, by being, as Freud said, in the position of “benevolent neutrality”, opens the way to the transference which is going to allow him to begin the psychoanalytic treatment. Obviously, transference is not a phenomenon arising solely within the psychoanalytic context; however, only analysis allows it to become something other than blindness, by attaching it to its unconscious roots.

Here we can say that Jennifer experienced the unit formed by the doctors and her mother as being truly persecuting and traumatizing, albeit that their conscious goal was to give her proper care. Conceived as an attempt to repair the damage transmitted by the father (and to a lesser degree by the mother), the care felt to her like an unbearable aggression, because she experienced it as a denial of her being and of the real meaning of her illness, a nullification of the questions she was trying to ask through the repeated fainting spells. (Simmonney 2001: 34-36).

Commentary

The neurotic symptoms (refusal of medical treatment, neglect of diet, fainting, etc.) are presented as bringing into the open not simply a repressed rage against a chronic, life-threatening disease but beyond it

a question about its origin, i.e., the mystery of her conception, set between the paternal lie and maternal blindness in some “unfathomable enjoyment (*jouissance*), with death haunting the shadows that ruled over her birth” – all festering like a “family secret.” But the sense of her question is not recognized. On the contrary, the care given her is experienced as a “hushing up” of the truth that she is trying to bring to light. The therapist: “Conceived as an attempt to repair the damage transmitted by the father (and to a lesser degree by the mother), the care felt to her like an unbearable aggression, because she experienced it as a denial of her being and the real meaning of her illness”. What she is seeking to uncover is this “family secret,” the truth of how she has come to be what she is, the basic facts (truth) of “what is the case” or her.

But what kind of truth can psychoanalytic experience in fact offer? Freud doesn’t help much to define a psychoanalytic version of truth. In his *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* he speaks of truth in terms of positive science:

Its endeavor is to arrive at correspondence with reality – that is to say with what exists outside us and independently of us and, as experience has taught us, is decisive for the fulfillment or disappointment of our wishes. This correspondence with the real external world we call “truth.” It remains the aim of scientific work even if we leave the practical value of that work out of account. (1933 [1932], 170)

As for truth in psychoanalysis, Freud presumably would add nuance to the term “reality” with his distinction between “psychical” and “material” reality (1900, 620), but his method would still be basically analogous to that of natural science, i.e., to search out the causes at play in any given psychic phenomenon.² But all this is the language of classical

² Evidence for this appears in the frequency with which he refers to his endeavor, especially in the early years, as an “etiology,” a science (*lógos*) of causes (*aitía*). For example: “On the Grounds for Detaching a Particular Syndrome under the

positivism, where truth consists in correspondence between subject judging and object judged. What happens to truth in psychoanalysis, though, when the positivist ideal familiar to Freud is rejected out of hand? Such was the move made by Lacan.

According to the canons of scientific positivism, the rigor of scientific method demanded that every effort be made to preclude intrusion by the subject into the content (i.e., “objectivity”) of that perception. In psychoanalysis, however, the subject is not *excluded* but *included* in the research procedure. Validation of any procedure must be found elsewhere than in conformity between judgment and judged. This was one reason for Lacan’s turn to formalism:

This is the problem of grounding that must assure our discipline its place among the sciences: a problem of formalization... Linguistics can serve us as a guide here, since that is the role it plays in the vanguard of contemporary anthropology... And the reduction of every language to the group of a very small number of these phenomenal oppositions by initiating an equally rigorous formalization of its highest morphemes puts within our reach a precisely defined access to our own field. (1977, 73/285)³

The shift to formalism, however, meant a shift in the understanding of truth. For the primordial experience of truth will appear not in a judgment about what is the case, but what is the case itself

Description Anxiety Neurosis. Incidence and Etiology of Anxiety Neurosis” (1895); “Obsessions and Phobias: Their Psychical Mechanism and Their Etiology” (1895); “Heredity and the Etiology of the Neuroses” (1896); “Further Remarks on the Neuropsychoses of Defense. The Specific Etiology of Hysteria” (1896); “The Etiology of Hysteria” (1896); “Sexuality in the Etiology of the Neuroses” (1896); “My Views on the Part Played by Sexuality in the Etiology of the Neuroses” (1906); “Some thoughts on Development and Regression – Etiology,” Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, III. (1916-1917).

³ It is the search for formalism that accounts for Lacan’s always expanding effort to schematize, logicize, mathematicize and finally topologize his own speculative conceptualizations.

insofar as it lets itself be seen (e-vident), i.e. the way things are in their very self-disclosure. (*The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* notes “evident” from the Latin *e-videre* as having originally the sense of the middle voice as “making itself be seen”. It is in this sense that I am using it here. The hyphenation is intended to call attention to the middle-voice quality of the etymology.) Accordingly, the case can be made (we shall return to this below) that e-evidence in its most radical sense of [something] making (letting) itself be seen is the originary nature of truth from which all other versions (conformity, coherence, pragmatic efficacy, linguistic formalism, etc.) derive.⁴ For Lacan it is clear that the formalism he strives for is the most acceptable way of discerning – and communicating – this kind of e-evidence for the way things are.

To be sure, this is never explicated by Lacan.⁵ In fact, to the best of my knowledge Lacan never reflects formally upon the nature of truth as such (a philosophical problem, after all), but the most telling use of the term refers to the subject’s relation to desire: “The whole analytical experience is no more than an invitation to the *revelation* of [the subject’s] *desire*” (1992, 221/261, emphasis added). It is in that sense that from the beginning of his work, Lacan presumes that truth is essentially the evidence for what is the case. In the early years of his teaching, for example, he made much of the distinction between “empty” speech and “full” speech: “empty speech takes place when the subject seems to be talking in vain about someone who, even if he were his spitting image,

⁴ For a succinct analysis of the nature of truth, especially as correspondence and coherence, each as distinct from meaning, see Cavell 1993, 17-18.

⁵ Lacan refers to truth often enough and thematizes it in an important way at least twice: in “Science and Truth” (1989) he talks about truth in relation to the exactitude that science seeks, and in psychoanalysis he distinguishes it from *savoir*. In *Le Séminaire. Livre XVII. L’envers de la psychanalyse (1969-1970)*, he begins to develop his conception of four types of social bond founded in language that he calls the “Four Discourses,” where truth is always on the periphery. But he never defines it precisely.

can never become one with the assumption of his desire” (1977, 45/254); “full” speech is achieved not by examination of the “here and now,” nor by the examination of resistances, but by *anamnesis*:

In psychoanalytic *anamnesis* it is not a question of reality, but of *truth*, because the effect of full speech is to reorder past contingencies by conferring on them the sense of necessities to come, such as they are constituted by the little freedom [the subject has] through which [it] makes them present. (1977, 48/256) [...] It is certainly this assumption of his history by the subject, in so far as it is constituted by the speech addressed to the Other, that constitutes the ground of the new method that Freud called psychoanalysis. (1977, 48/257, emphasis added).

The truth of the subject (i.e., of one’s desire) comes about, then, through the speaking that constitutes the psychoanalytic process. It is not based on any kind of correspondence; it is essentially revelatory in nature and takes place when meaning (sense) is discovered in an historicizing account. It has no other foundation than the efficacy of the language that utters it and prescind completely from the “reality” that characterizes the world of its conscious activity. Founded thus in language itself, truth has an inexhaustible resilience: “Even if [language] communicates nothing, the discourse represents the existence of communication; even if it denies the evidence, it affirms that [it is] speech that constitutes truth; even if it is intended to deceive, the discourse [trades] on faith in testimony” (1977, 43/251-2).

There is another element in Lacan’s operative conception of truth: the negativity that permeates it. As early as 1955 in “The Freudian Thing,” a paper commemorating in Vienna the centenary of Freud’s birth, Lacan delivered a grotesque *prosopopeia* (that figure of speech in which an absent person, abstract idea or sheer fantasy is represented as addressing an audience). Here it is Truth itself that speaks: “Men, listen, I am giving you the secret. I, Truth, will speak”. His point is that there is no such thing as total truth – especially in psychoanalysis – and truth arrives at

best as damaged goods. Eventually he will claim that no truth can ever be whole (1998, 92/85). Here, however, he underlines the inevitable distortion of truth as it comes to expression:

For you I am the enigma of her who vanishes as soon as she appears... The discourse of error, its articulation in acts, could bear witness to the truth against evidence itself... For the most innocent intention is disconcerted at being unable to conceal the fact that one's unsuccessful acts are the most successful and that one's failure fulfills one's most secret wish... I wander about in what you regard as being the least true in essence: in the dream, in the way the most far-fetched conceit, the most grotesque nonsense of the joke defies sense, in chance, not in its law, but in its contingency, and I never do more to change the face of the world than when I give it the profile of Cleopatra's nose (1977, 121-122/408-10).

Truth, then, carries the scars of negativity. In other words: "Error is the habitual incarnation of truth. Error is the usual manifestation of the truth itself – so that the paths of truth are in essence the paths of error" (1988, 263/289). Clearly, any complete account of truth must also account for the error and distortion (i.e., non-truth) that infiltrate it, especially in psychoanalysis. So be it! We shall return to this.

For Jennifer, the negative valence of truth as discovery does not appear in the therapist's undetailed record of the treatment. But no doubt it appears in the clinical work in any form of resistance to the dispelling of darkness, beginning with the recalcitrance that marked her first day. Add to this all those grab-bag banalities (e.g., parapraxes, slips of the tongue) that constitute the day labor of analytic work. Then there are dreams. In turning to Jennifer's dreams, the therapist focuses on one series in particular that is representative.

Quarry

We are going to continue now with [a form] of repetition, that of a dream which returned in similar forms during several sessions. The general theme of the dream is as follows: Jennifer finds herself in a boarding school where she had, in reality, spent two years before being expelled for reasons of discipline six months ago. She feels deep regrets about no longer being in that institution intended for young people who are ill. She felt at home there, sheltered from the kind of heavy observation which she has to confront elsewhere: in that place she was no different from her peers.

Her dreams took her back to that place which she has idealized somewhat since her expulsion. Her dreams placed her once again among her favorite friends and teachers. The more often the dream came back, the more reticent she became about telling it to me: what was the use, since it was always the same thing? I pointed out to her that, first of all, a dream never repeats itself exactly the same way, and that the repetition is a sign that there is something that is insisting on being “read” [or heard] in order to find a meaning. The identical dreams came one after another, session after session, but never failed to bring out some significant differences which allowed for progress in the analysis. One day, in a dream that took her once again to her former boarding school, she saw herself faint: a woman teacher, who was one of her favorites, took care of her with warmth and concern. “It’s not like my mother” added Jennifer “who is aggressive and worried when she takes care of me”. She went on: “Yesterday, an asthmatic friend of mine fainted. Every one hurried to take care of her. I asked them if that was the way they took care of me. They answered ‘yes,’ which reassured me, but I did not want to watch. I don’t like to see such things; watching reminds me of myself”.

We see here the development of the group of problems surrounding [the gaze of] the Other.

Jennifer needs a helpful regard/gaze, stripped of the aggressiveness that often accompanies the assistance given by.. her mother. She does not want her suffering to be thrown back at her as by a mirror, which was why she did not want to look at her friend who had just fainted. She would rather identify with a healthy adult who gives aid to an ill person, such as Jennifer herself.. We now understand better her nostalgia for that boarding school where, far removed from her mother, she could encounter such [looks as these].

At the end of the session she said: "I've understood that I must be positive about things". We can interpret that statement as a wish to leave the position of victim where she had been stuck.

During the next session, she told me a dream in which she returned to the boarding school, not as an ill person, but simply to visit her friends. The principal asked her to stay but she refused.

We see this dream, in some ways, as a dream of healing. She added: "I am proud and relieved to have had this dream. Now I am less ill, I no longer have my place at the boarding school. I must leave my place to someone who needs it more". We see here again her psyche working to free her from an identification with her illness, this idea appearing clearly in the words: "leave my place to someone else". This series of repeated dreams provided the opportunity for a psychic effort, which was concluded by the last dream. From that day on, she no longer dreamed of that boarding school; she no longer needed to do it.

Commentary

This is indeed a dream of healing, and the repetitive chain is taken as a sign of progress that confirms the efficacy of the method. The dreams are disclosive in quality, for each dream deals with Jennifer's struggle to confront her regret that through her own fault she had been expelled from a boarding school where, whatever its limitations, she was more comfortable than with her mother at home. The minor differences that characterized the repetition of the same theme were significant enough to "allow for progress" (i.e., clarification) in the analysis. Three observations are in order:

In the first place, the efficacy of the treatment clearly depends on its revelatory character. It lets the truth of Jennifer gradually disclose itself, so that the orientation of her desire begins to appear. Apparently it was the "talking" therapy that enabled this to come about.

Secondly, the disclosure is hampered by a built-in negativity that sabotages the process, and in dreams, distortion is one form of that negativity. In the present case the dream content works its way through the continually differentiating "details" of the dreamwork, the repetition being a sign that something still obscure is insisting on being "read" [or heard] in order for meaning to appear. This slow uncovering of still to be articulated "meaning," manifested through distortion in dreams, is symptomatic, I suggest, of other negative modes of disclosure – besides Freud's favorite examples (slips of the tongue, parapraxes, etc.) – such as confusion, obscurity, ambivalence, inconsistency, contradiction, paradox, and all the ingenious subterfuges of self deception that mark the humdrum work of the psychoanalytic enterprise.

Finally, the disclosive process is liberating. The last dream in this series suggests that Jennifer wishes to dissociate herself from her role as victim of illness and to identify with a healthy adult "who gives aid to an ill person". such as Jennifer herself. Her own remark indicates the progress: "I've understood that I must be positive about things". The follow-up dream, in which she was invited to return to boarding school

but chose not to because she no longer needed it, is characteristic of the normal way by which symptoms dissolve: compromise solutions to unsettled conflicts become unnecessary when the original problem is straightforwardly uncovered and dealt with in the open. The truth that the “talking” cure illumines in the subject makes possible its own kind of freedom, freedom from darkness. Psychoanalytically speaking, this type of liberation from darkness may be the most we can hope for.

All this is well and good, but none of it deals with the question of how such a process is possible. This, of course, is the philosophical question that Lacan dismisses, but Heidegger, to whom Lacan often alluded (especially in the early years but with increasing reserve as time went on), can be helpful here. Obviously the notion of originary truth as e-vidence/discovery/disclosure/ recalls Heidegger’s thematizing of the Greek word for truth, *alétheia*: a combination of *-lêthé* (what lies hidden in concealment) and *a-*, the alpha prefix indicating privation. Taken together, they identify truth as non-concealment (revelation, disclosure). Of course Lacan was fully aware of Heidegger’s conception of truth and apparently quite comfortable with it in 1953 when describing the psychoanalytic process as the achieving of “full speech”: “In psychoanalytic *anamnesis* it is not a question of reality, but of *truth*, because the effect of full speech is to reorder past contingencies by conferring on them the sense of necessities to come... (1977, 48/256, emphasis added). Apparently he lost interest in this way of conceiving truth as he turned more and more toward the formalism, inspired by Saussure through Lévi-Strauss, that could account in a structuralist way for the “scientific” character of psychoanalysis, which he wanted very much to retain..

Heidegger broached the question of truth already in his major work, *Being and Time* (1996 [1927], 196-211) but shortly after thematized the issue in a complete essay, “On the Essence Truth” (1998 [1930-1943]). There he begins with an analysis of the classical notion of truth as conformity between judgment and judged but then proceeds phenomenologically:

What is stated by the presentative statement [judgment] is said of the presented thing [judged] in just such manner as that thing, as presented, is. The “such as” has to do with the presenting and what it presents. Disregarding all “psychological” preconceptions as well as those of any “theory of consciousness,” to present here means to let the thing stand opposed as an object. As thus placed, what stands opposed must traverse an open field of opposedness [*Entgegen*] and nevertheless must maintain its stand as a thing and show itself as something withstanding [*ein Ständiges*] [the traverse]. This appearing of the thing in traversing a field of opposedness takes place within an open region, the openness of which is not first created by the presenting but rather is only entered into and taken over as a domain of relatedness. The relation of the presentative statement to the thing is the accomplishment of the bearing [stance] [*Verhältnis*] that originarily and always comes to prevail as a comportment [*Verhalten*]. But all comportment is distinguished by the fact that, standing in the open region, it in each case adheres to something opened up as such. What is thus opened up, solely in this strict sense, was experienced early in Western thinking as “what is present” and for a long time has been named “[a] being [*ein Seiendes*]”. (1998 [1930-1943], 141)

It is this field of openness that Heidegger claims to be what the Greeks understood as *alétheia* (1998 [1930-1943], 145). Human comportment stands within this openness, open to beings in this way, and one’s open stance varies according to the kind of comportment in question. In Heidegger’s eyes, I suggest, it would be such an open stance as this that Jennifer, unknowingly of course, would bring into treatment on the deepest level her quest for the “family secret”.

Heidegger’s next move is to ask about the “essence” of this openness, its ultimate “nature”. His answer is: ... freedom! How is such a freedom to be thought here? “Freedom for what is opened up in an open region lets beings be the beings that they are. Freedom now reveals itself as letting beings be”:

The phrase required now – to let beings be – does not refer to neglect and indifference but rather the opposite. To let be is to engage oneself with beings. On the other hand, to be sure, this is not to be understood only as mere management, preservation, tending and planning of beings in each case encountered or sought out. To let be – that is to let beings be the beings that they are – means to engage oneself with the open region and its openness into which every being comes to stand, bringing that openness, as it were, along with itself. To engage oneself with the disclosedness of beings is not to lose oneself in them; rather, such engagement withdraws in the face of beings in order that they might reveal themselves with respect to what and how they are... (1998 [1930-1943], 144)

I take this to mean that in psychoanalysis, the task of the analyst would be to let the analysand (here Jennifer) be, so that she in turn may let herself be and thus achieve the freedom that comes with the disclosure of what she is in truth. Practically speaking, this would mean for the analyst to let her discourse be and have its way with her, guarding against any infiltration of his own signifying system into hers. In the case of Jennifer, the therapist seems to have been able to do just that. Note, for example, the sensitivity with which he hears the signifier “child” in the second session. For him, her entire pathology resonates in it: “It is fitting to underline her use of the word ‘child’, which, though she is no longer really a child, points to an infantile and old source of her disorder,” i.e., the family secret. Likewise, through the repetitive dreams and her articulation of them, despite her resistant reticence in doing so, the truth of her relation to the hospital slowly appears and finally lets her be free from her dependence upon it.

But an adequate conception of truth must include also the element of non-truth that is ingredient to it. Heidegger is helpful here, too. What he adds to the conception of truth as *alétheia* is an insistence on the negative component of truth ingredient to it, the *léthé*. The negativity in question is not simply an absence of manifestation but

includes a dynamic quality that Heidegger articulates as the non-essence of truth, which takes two forms: mystery (*Geheimnis*), the concealment of what still remains unrevealed, and errancy (*Irre*), a compounding through forgetfulness of this double concealment:

Errancy is the essential counteressence to the originary essence of truth. Errancy opens itself up as the open region for every counterplay to essential truth. Errancy is the open site for and ground of error. Error is not merely an isolated mistake but the kingdom (the dominion) of the history of those entanglements in which all kinds of wandering about [in errancy] get interwoven. In conformity with its openness and its relatedness to beings as a whole, every mode of comportment has its way of wandering in errancy. Error extends from the most ordinary wasting of time, making a mistake, and miscalculating, to going astray and venturing too far in one's essential attitudes and decisions... By leading them astray, errancy dominates human beings through and through. (1998 [1930-1947], 150-1, emended)

My suggestion is that this conception of a non-essence (i.e., negativity) of truth, especially under the guise of errancy, is supple enough and comprehensive enough to accommodate Lacan's hyperbolic *prosopopeia* in which he lets Truth itself take the floor:

Lacan insists on one more point: the close correlation between truth and the function of language. For Heidegger, this correlation is based upon his interpretation of the meaning of *lógos* for the Greeks, as we have seen, for example in the work of Heraclitus (1975, 59-78). Although *lógos* from early on was associated with speech, the original sense of it for Heraclitus, Heidegger claims, came from *legein*, meaning "to gather" (as one gathers wood), or "to bring together" into some kind of unity, that thereby becomes manifest as what it is. Like *phýsis*, *lógos* was from the beginning associated with the coming to pass of *alétheia*, the unconcealment of everything that is. The task of human beings would be to collaborate with the process by letting beings be seen as what they

are. Eventually, it became possible to think of this gathering process (the coming-to-pass of truth) as originary language and of the vocation of human beings as bringing it to expression in words. At any rate, the vocation of human beings as such would be to bring to articulation the language of *lógos* as process of *alétheia*, a task for which the poets serve as models. Psychoanalytically speaking, then, *alétheia* comes to pass through the *lógos* that functions in the very speaking through which “full” speech comes about. It is in this sense that “truth is grounded in the fact that it *speaks* and it has no other means of [being grounded]” (1989, 16/867-8, emphasis added).

* * *

This reflection has addressed the question about how the “talking cure” succeeds when it does succeed. It has ventured to say that the treatment succeeds because the truth it seeks is the truth of revelation (*alétheia*) which is self-validating to the extent that the e-evidence for e-evidence is e-evidence. As a liberating from darkness (*léthé*), this truth is essentially freedom, and freedom of this kind comes to pass through the functioning of language.

Is this a satisfactory answer to the question about how the “talking cure” cures? Hardly. At best it serves as propaedeutic to a further examination of the real issues involved. Fundamental questions remain unaddressed, For example: What are the practical implications of the conception of truth as revelation in a concrete clinical setting? How does the conception of freedom articulated here relate to classical issues of freedom (e.g., the role of choice in the exercise of freedom, as in Jennifer’s choice to forego return to the hospital)? How are we to understand the relationship between language (*lógos*) as originary and language (*lógos*) as ordinary, i.e., as concretely functional in the clinical situation? Finally, are we really justified in introducing Heideggerian thought patterns to throw light on very conventional psychoanalytic issues as they are raised in a case such as Jennifer’s? Was not the coolness toward Heidegger in

Lacan's later years well advised? Is not Heidegger's question (about the meaning of Being) and the verbal apparatus that goes with it, excluded a priori from any relevance to psychoanalysis, inasmuch as, in Lacan's conception of language, "there is no Other [e.g., Being] of the Other [i.e., the symbolic order of language]" (1977, 310-11/813)?

None of these questions has been seriously addressed here – each demands its own careful consideration. But where else can we turn? The question of how the "talking cure" cures simply will not go a way.

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