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12 Questions about Psychoanalysis: Answers by Alenka Zupan*?*i?

I – As a philosopher, what is it that interests you in psychoanalysis, and why?

Psychoanalysis is not simply a therapeutic practice. It is – perhaps above all – a stunning *conceptual invention* that made this new practice possible. In this sense, psychoanalysis is also something that “happened” to philosophy and that philosophy cannot remain indifferent to, as if nothing happened there. But this implies of course that – as Lacan put it somewhere – “psychoanalysis is not psychology”. For me this means that psychoanalysis is not a regional science of human being, but concerns, and has something to say about, the very constitution of subjectivity, also in its profound philosophical sense. Lacan’s “return to Freud” involved an extremely serious engagement with philosophy, the whole history of philosophy, as a means of showing and conceptualizing what is so new, or different about Freud. Psychoanalysis is not simply a move “beyond” philosophy; in many ways, philosophy itself has always been a move beyond (previous) philosophy...

But to answer your question more directly: my main interest in psychoanalysis relates to the way in which it allowed us to rethink and maintain the notion of the subject at the very moment when contemporary philosophy was ready to discard this concept as belonging to its metaphysical past. Instead of joining this adage, Lacan revolutionized the notion of the subject in – also – philosophically most interesting way. Subject is not simply an autonomous, free agent, but it is also not simply a mere effect of the structure as fully consistent in itself. It is rather an effect of the gap in this structure, of its inherent inconsistency or incompleteness. And this has important philosophical, ontological, as well as political consequences. For example, it is my strong conviction that there can be no (philosophical) materialism without the concept of the subject. This is also related to what is probably Lacan’s most genuine and important conceptual invention, namely that of the “object small *a*”: a singular kind of object, which is not the opposite of the subject, but rather the “extimate” kernel of the subject herself, something in the subject more than subject, something that the subject cannot recognize herself in.... These concepts are absolutely relevant for philosophy.

II – What is the most significant contribution that philosophy has made to psychoanalysis, at least from your personal approach to psychoanalysis?

When Lacan brought philosophical discussion into the very heart of his psychoanalytic Seminar, a new and most interested space of thinking opened up, which was neither simply “clinical” nor “philosophical” in the traditional sense. It went strongly against the established ways in both fields, and it also met with strong resistance in both fields. The resistance on the side of psychoanalytic establishment was probably even stronger.

On the other hand, many young philosophers at that time thought there was something very interesting going on in Lacan's Seminar; they perceived it as a possible site of a genuine conceptual revolution. This perception/reception in itself already constituted a very important contribution that (contemporary) philosophy made to psychoanalysis. Of course, Lacan himself did go through a serious philosophical formation that allowed to formulate the gist of Freud's discovery in a philosophically interesting way, that is to say in a way that opened psychoanalysis up to something else than simply a destiny of being a "local (human) science". In other words, and to put it very bluntly, philosophy contributed a possibly universal scope to psychoanalytic theory, as well as the ability to perceive its ontological relevance. Psychoanalysis is not a new ontology, but it is also not without relation to ontology and ontological interrogations. And this gets completely lost when it is reduced merely to its therapeutic dimension. And I think this also applies to the very clinical configuration: the question of the end and ends of psychoanalysis as therapy is not itself a therapeutic question, but involves decisions that are both of ethical and political order, and that philosophy also allows to interrogate. Not to see these implications means that psychoanalysts become "orthopedists of the unconscious", as Lacan puts it in one of his witty formulations. Important to stress here, however, is that philosophy is not a kind of necessary *supplement* to psychoanalysis. Ethics of psychoanalysis is not a philosophical question to be added to the clinical *savoir faire*, it is the intrinsic philosophical question of the clinics itself. And so are many others.

V – Nietzsche and Freud. Freud admitted having never really read Nietzsche, because he feared discovering that Nietzsche had already said everything essential that Freud himself thought he had said. How do you view the relation between Freud and Nietzsche?

Here I have a bit more complex theory of this relationship. There is, on the one hand, what we can call a whole series of superficial resemblances. Nietzsche prized himself with his psychological insights about "men". These insights doubtlessly exist, and are proliferating, but they cannot be taken separately from Nietzsche's (new) ontology. To ask psychological questions and interrogate psychological motivations behind supposedly neutral philosophical claims is there to introduce a new series of philosophical claims and perspectives. Nietzsche is a philosopher from head to toes, and his notion of genealogy gave rise to some vital currents of contemporary philosophy – suffices to mention Foucault. But genealogy is not exactly psychoanalysis. And here, where resemblance seems to be the most obvious, the two are perhaps the furthest away. I think Freud sensed this, and was reluctant to go for the (too) obvious, he sensed that there was perhaps a slightly different kind of "revolution" at stake in these two projects. And there was.

On the other hand, Nietzsche comes close to psychoanalysis and its project often there where he is not practicing any kind of direct "psychology" or genealogy: for example with his singular notion of temporality (eternal return not as cyclical time, but as repetition of a fundamental interruption, or of a "timeless moment") and of the kind of theory of the subject implied in this configuration, if we think it through...

VI – From its start, psychoanalysis—including Fenichel, Bernfeld, Reich, Fromm, and others—developed a Freudian-Marxist current among both analysts and philosophers, which still flourishes today. How should we view today the relation amongst Marx, Marxists, and psychoanalysis?

This is a very interesting and complex question. Freudo-Marxism (or "sexo-leftism", as Lacan used to call it) basically saw Marxism and psychoanalysis as supplementing (or complementing) each other, with psychoanalysis explaining, and eventually taking care of, the psychological causes of the perpetuation of power, exploitation and subordination. Its basic scheme is that oppression causes repression (in the sense of *Vedrückung*), which then causes further (social) oppression, and that one of the culturally, or socially, most acute sites of oppression is sexuality. If we liberate it (also institutionally), we can interrupt this causality and bring about a more general social liberation. I'm simplifying, but that's the basic presupposition

nevertheless. Yet what Freud already saw, and Lacan made explicit, is that there is something wrong with this presupposition, so far as it maintains that all the “trouble with sex” come from the outside it and are the result of oppression (regulation) imposed *on*sexuality. Instead, they claimed that there was something in sex which was inherently problematic, disrupting it from within, preventing a full or non-problematic satisfaction. The project of Freudian psychoanalysis is not sexual liberation, as leading to a waster social liberation. The unconscious is also not simply about all the things we repress (and why), but about how a certain dimension of repression is built in and comes with the symbolic order as such. This is why in psychoanalysis liberation does not simply mean liberation from oppression, but also the ability to handle and confront the points of structural impasse, which are also the main sources of oppression and further repression. In other words, if sex is repressed and regulated in many ways, it is not because it brings in a threat of some possibly unbribed enjoyment, but because it brings in and perpetuates a structural impasse...

This does of course not exhaust the question of the relation between Marx and Freud, which certainly exists and is most interesting. For example, and as Louis Althusser argued in his powerful essay “On Marx and Freud,” one of the things Marxism and psychoanalysis have in common is that they are both conflictual sciences. They are both situated *within the conflict* that they theorize; they are themselves part of the very reality that they recognize as conflictual and antagonistic. In such a case the criterion of scientific objectivity is not a supposed neutrality, which is nothing other than a dissimulation (and hence the perpetuation) of the given antagonism, or of the point of real exploitation. In any social conflict, a “neutral” position is always and necessarily the position of the ruling class: it seems “neutral” because it has achieved the status of the dominant ideology, which always strikes us as self-evident. The criterion of objectivity in such a case is thus not neutrality, but the capacity of theory to occupy a singular, specific point of view within the situation. In this sense, the objectivity is linked here to the very capacity of being “partial” or “partisan.” As Althusser puts it: when dealing with a conflictual reality (which is the case for both Marxism and psychoanalysis) one cannot see everything from everywhere (*on ne peut pas tout voir de partout*); some positions dissimulate this conflict, and some reveal it. One can thus discover the essence of this conflictual reality only by occupying certain positions, and not others, in this very conflict. Now my claim would be that that sex, or *the sexual*, is precisely such a “position,” or point of view, in psychoanalysis. This is very different from saying that psychoanalysis takes sex to be the ultimate reality or truth of everything; no, sex is a privileged entry to the contradictions (antagonisms) which it forces us to see, to think, and to engage with.

VII – Do you believe that psychoanalysis can be a useful tool for interpreting political and social phenomena and customs today? And especially for interpreting gender issues and sexual orientations debate? And if yes, in what way?

Yes, psychoanalysis can intervene in these debates in a productive way. Not at all so as to preach the traditional family ways and values, but also not so as to promote sexual orientation as a simple question of choice within liberal system of values. To say to people that they are “free to choose” their sexuality and create their sexual identity is a very dubious line. For one thing is to question the pre-allocated symbolic roles and their cultural meanings and enforcement, and something else is to refuse to see the problematic core of sexuality as such. In other words: normative heterosexual sexuality is itself problematic and struggling with an impasse, which is precisely why it can feel so threatened by, say homosexuality. There is no sexuality that is simply non-problematic. Which is why the idea of “liberation of sexuality” is nowadays often replaced by the idea of “liberation from sexuality”. Social discrimination and persecution (which certainly exist) of some forms of sexual orientation need to be understood against the background of the problematic character of sexuality as such. The ideology of the free market of sexual orientations covers up and perpetuates antagonisms involved in sexuality, and allows for their further exploitation. Sex is a matter of “choice” on a very different level – say on the level that Kant would call the “transcendental choice of character”, or that Lacan (after Freud) called the “choice of neurosis”. It is not a choice that we make as (autonomous) subjects, but the choice through which we *become* subjects, as fundamentally subjects of this “choice”, of this particular answer to the structural impasse.

X – Do you find it important that psychoanalysis today confronts itself with biological knowledge (evolutionary sciences, neuroscience), and with science in general?

Yes, of course, psychoanalysis cannot ignore this. Lacan interrogated the relationship between psychoanalysis and science all the time, he even claimed that the subject of the unconscious is the subject of modern (Galilean) science. In the same way it is not enough today to try to “keep up” with recent developments in sciences, one also needs to keep interrogating this relationship. Which is why pointing out the similarities (or else dissimilarities) is not enough. Neuroscience is based on a whole set of presuppositions that it rarely questions, or which it doesn’t want to know anything about. This does not prevent it from achieving amazing results, or making big advances, as we say. Psychoanalysis is sometimes seen (by psychoanalysts) as the guardian of our essential humanity which is more and more disappearing in the purely scientific approach to human beings. That is, it is seen as the guardian and keeper of that which escapes calculations, brain scans and scientific formulas. This is a rather traditional fear that science will erase or dispel the mystery that makes us interesting as humans. I think one has to reverse the perspective here: the problem is not simply that of the disappearing of opacity, but rather its massive creation somewhere else. There is certainly no lack of obscurantism around, starting with obscurantism that many scientists advocate and practice in their “free” time, as if to compensate for their work-related rationality. The unconscious is far from disappearing, it is produced on a massive scale, although it takes some new forms. Psychoanalysis – at least in the way I understand and appreciate it – doesn’t claim that *besides* reason and rationality we also possess other dimensions which need to be taken into account. Its fundamental and most revolutionary claim was that the reason itself is structured around an “irrational” core; that there is something “irrational” at the very heart of reason – which doesn’t make it any less reason. The thesis about the unconscious concerns our very rationality, and not something else besides, or on top of it. There are some scientific theories which resonate with this, or point in a similar direction, but there is also a lot of rather naïve scientism going on, supplementing itself with various forms of mysticism.

To drop just one crazy idea: we are indeed nothing more than what a brain scan reveals, but rather something *less*. Brain scans are supposed to make sense and to be (at least potentially) entirely mapable onto our individuality. But what if they aren’t? What makes us subjects (of the unconscious) is perhaps not something which doesn’t show on the brain scan, but rather something that shows only on the brain scan and cannot be mapped onto anything else...

Bio:

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