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The European Journal of Psychoanalysis

Jul 13, 2024

<https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/articles/answers-by-jean-luc-nancy-2/>

Jean-Luc Nancy

12 Questions about Psychoanalysis: Answers by Jean-Luc Nancy

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

For me Freud is the philosopher of metapsychology and the magnificent successor of the *drive*, which became manifest with Kant and since then has never ceased to shift Being...

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

With Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, I examined the philosophical sources and implications of Lacan – himself a philosopher, thickly mixed with all thinking from Heidegger to Derrida.

III – Apart from Freud, what other psychoanalyst, according to you, has contributed significantly to a philosophical reflection on psychoanalysis?

Apart from Lacan, I know too little about other psychoanalytical authors.

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?

The drive – the *Trieb* – plays an extremely important role in Nietzsche (who is an important link in the chain that goes from Kant to Freud; if we studied closely this motif in Nietzsche, we would be sure to find some sorts of anticipations of Freud).

But we would not find there what ultimately makes the drive “our myth,” as Freud said: that is to say, the fiction of a reality that is neither physical nor psychical and that gives full reality to the side before [*en-deçà*] or to the side beyond [*au-delà*] any division between body and mind: precisely what Freud was able to touch upon.

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 something I know too little about. It seems to me that these relations (between Marx and Freud) are mostly presented in very superficial or artificial ways. Marx is completely within the element of consciousness. Perhaps in certain points he does touch lightly upon the unconscious, but his idea of “alienation” is not enough to reach the unconscious, because it is an idea that presumes the alienation of something-that-belongs-to-you [*d’un propre*], or of an authenticity. On the contrary, the unconscious implies an essential non-property or inauthenticity, in the sense that there is nothing-that-belongs-to-you or anything authentic to wait for or seek. This is what Lacan undoubtedly captured even more incisively than Freud.

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

Just a little... and only metaphorically. The schema of the analytic cure, at least, is powerless in this respect. But the philosophy of drives, of their repression [*refoulement*] or release [*défoulement*], must most certainly be exploited. In particular the power or domination drive – and libertarianism too, which wishes to abolish any kind of repression...

But we should completely reconsider the process of “cultural repression” and of its sense. It re-plays in reverse the (Rousseauian) process of denaturation through culture: now we should dismiss the two wholes and rethink “humanity” in “nature” and “against” nature...

IX – Starting with Popper, over the past decades a trend of radical criticism of psychoanalysis has developed that denies its scientific plausibility, comparing it to a mythology, and contesting any validity of the analytic practice. Where do you fit in this debate, if you do at all?

Those who oppose “science” to “myth” are themselves very much behind with respect to the sciences themselves, which are becoming more and more aware that they are producing fictions!

Freud never ceased to seek and affirm a going beyond object science and a going beyond the fiction of a subject.

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

I think that meta-psychology – which is a metaphysics in the non-Heideggerian sense of the term – is also necessarily a meta-biology. “Life” is no longer the object of biology. Life is rather the drive itself, so-to-speak... the creating and destroying drive...

XI – Today, psychoanalysis compares itself with rival psychotherapies and theories—behavioral and/or cognitive psychotherapy, systemic-relational psychotherapy, and an assortment of other types of cures. Where do you situate psychoanalysis in all of this? And in particular, can we say that psychoanalysis is a psychotherapy, and if it is, in what sense?

Profoundly, psychoanalysis— and this is something Lacan never ceased to repeat – is by no means a therapy. As a therapy, it melts into the “psychotherapeutic” whole before the latter disappears into a mutation of

civilization.

Psychoanalysis absolutely demolishes the very idea of therapy, of illness, and so on. Already Freud suspected – partly in an ironic mode – that neurosis begins with asking oneself about the sense of life... Today this questioning is a matter of civilization, as much as the various forms of “behaviorist” or biochemical psychiatry: illnesses and medications of the same *Unbehagen in der Kultur*. With regard to psychoses, and effort is made to try to cure them, but they belong to the mystical sphere, whether divine, poetical or shamanic, according to one’s preferences: only a new mysticism and a totally different species of rapture will absorb them.

Of course psychotherapies are important and necessary – whether for ordinary perturbations or for those caused today by conflicts, migrations, poverty, and so on. They are necessary, whilst psychoanalysis “strictly speaking” is not.

Psychoanalysis will split into two: on the one hand psychotherapy and clinical practice, on the other metaphysics, where the “psyche” will be metamorphosed into a never seen before relationship with the impossible or the infinite. All that will remain in the end is “meta” – the psychic and the psychical will be forgotten.

Or, another hypothesis: everything will be forgotten and erased – but, in that case, absolutely everything.

XII – Many philosophers are particularly interested in the thought of Jacques Lacan. What value or meaning do you attribute to the Lacanian après-coup?

I already provided many answers to this above. I shall only add that Lacan was always divided, ripped apart, between practice and thinking. It was to escape this split that he insisted on the relationship between clinical practice and theory.

But, deep down, he never believed in it. He knew that this distinction and its resolution were artifices. Only a “clinical practice” inherent to the thinking, and to the spirituality of a society, can come out of this *bricolage*: like what the great religions, the great ethics, wisdoms, or however we want to call them, did and continue to do in certain cultures.

I could formulate the whole thing in these terms: only witch doctors can act in a bewitched world; but in a “disenchanted” world, all technical or technoid operations can only bring limited aid...

Bio:

Jean-Luc Nancy (Caudéran, France 1940-2021) taught philosophy at the University of Strasbourg and previously taught at the University of California San Diego. Among his works: with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Le titre de la lettre. Une lecture de Lacan* (Paris: Galilée, 1972) and *L’Absolu littéraire* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1978); *La communauté désœuvrée* (Paris: 1986, 2001); *L’expérience de la liberté* (Paris: Galilée, 1988); *Etre singulier pluriel* (Paris: 1996); *Hegel, L’inquiétude du négatif* (Paris: 1997); *Le regard du portrait* (Paris: Galilée, 2000); *L’”il y a” du rapport sexuel* (Paris: Galilée, 2001). With Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe. *Dernières publications : . Banalité de Heidegger* (Galilée 2015). *Sexistence* (Galilée 2017). *Exclu le juif en nous* (Galilée, 2018). *La Peau fragile du monde* (Galilée 2020). *Un trop humain virus* (Bayard 2020). *Mascarons de Macron* (Galilée 2021). [Jean-Luc.Nancy@wanadoo.fr]

Publication Date:

September 2, 2018