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# LETTERS. Answer to Raymond Barglow by Sergio Benvenuto

1.

If at a certain level psychoanalysis incorporates (or tries to incorporate) advances (but not methods!) of natural sciences, analytic philosophy certainly does not. Analytic philosophy itself generally says that sciences are synthetic and not analytic, which is an essential difference.

It is true that analytic philosophy is usually (with some exceptions) hostile to psychoanalysis in general, not to Kleinism in particular. Bouveresse's book (*Wittgenstein Reads Freud. The Myth of the Unconscious* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1995]) is one of the clearest summaries of why analytic philosophers reproach Freud: in short, his confusion between "scientific explanations" and "subjective understanding". Yet it is interesting that analytic philosophers often confront Freud (generally in a critical way) but NEVER M. Klein or Bion. This is not my opinion, it is a fact. You might say: "this fact is not significant"ÑNon the contrary I find this fact very significant. This is not because Klein or Bion would escape philosophical criticisms, but because Kleinism carries to an extreme that for which analytic philosophy, since Wittgenstein, has reproached psychoanalysis: its mythical pretension to build a science of subjectivity. According to this kind of philosophy, only behavioral sciences are possible, because no knowledge can derive from subjective *Erlebnisse*, "ways of feeling". In fact, distrust between analytic philosophers and British analysts is mutual. When Marc Du Ry interviewed Ronald MeltzerÑthe leading Kleinian analyst in BritainÑthe latter said that he recommended for a good training of analysts not the study of medicine but of humanities (English literature, history of art, etc.) *except philosophy* (which is, for any British citizen, analytic philosophy): "I am convinced that a philosophical training can be a serious obstacle [for an analyst]." (See Sergio Benvenuto & Oscar Nicolaus, eds., *La bottega dell'anima* [Rome: Franco Angeli, 1990], p. 236)

It is not only analytic philosophers, but also many non-Kleinian analysts, who reproach Kleinism for its "idealism" (in philosophical sense) because of the primacy it gives to projections. "In M. Klein everything springs from the inside: objects, bad or good, just come out, as rabbits or doves, from the illusionist's box" (Jean Laplanche, *Le primat de l'autre en psychanalyse* [Paris: Flammarion, 1997] p. 355). When Freud interprets subjective processes through a dream or a slip of the tongue, these processes appear, in a quite simple way, to follow some basic rules. It is possible to de-privatize Freud's interpretations, as Ego Psychology and LacanismÑfrom two completely different perspectivesÑtried to do. Ego Psychology tried to integrate behavioral sciences into psychoanalysis, and Lacanism brought a new outlook to the unconscious as far as it is considered something not especially "intimate" or "private", because it is bound to something as public as language. But Kleinism took the opposite road by emphasizing precisely that which for philosophers represented the worst of Freudianism: the idea of a "mental world" to be described through interpretations.

I was trained as a clinical psychologist and an analyst first in France and later in Italy. At that time Lacanism prevailed in France and Kleinism (later, Bion's thought) in Italy, but both national analytic cultures shared a deep respect for the Kleinian approach and a deep contempt for Anna-Freudism and American

psychoanalysis in general. One of the most influential Italian analysts, Francesco Corrao, who introduced Bion's thought in Italy, often said that psychoanalysis in America was now only a caricature, and American psychoanalysts were like Lucy in Schultz's comic strip. In spite of this cross-cultural consensus, from the beginning I always found the Kleinian approach disappointing and unconvincing (but only with getting older was I able to "come out" as an anti-Kleinian, which was not so easy in romance language countries!). I often preferred even some American or German Ego-psychologists to orthodox Kleinism. I think that my early and untrendy distaste for the Kleinian style was bound to my philosophical formation: its strong "thing-ation" (*chosification*) of mental processes contrasted sharply with any philosophical precaution.

In her theory of depression, for example, Klein says (on many occasions) that "in manic-depressive illness one is afraid of having inside dead or dying objects". It is true that a depressed person describes herself as a kind of dying person, a zombie, a human wreck, etc., but why does Klein stress that dead or dying OBJECTS are INSIDE the psyche? As a philosopher, I find this shift from describing an experience toward an "objectification" of it unjustified: a fetishization of the mental experience. It is true that Freud was the first to say that in melancholia the subject tortures the ambivalent object and that this object is, in a certain way, internalized, but Freud writes wisely that "*the shadow* of the object fell upon the ego [my italics]" (*SE*, 14, p. 249). In Freud the object remains primarily the external person or thing the subject loved-hated, and depression involves the "shadow" of this object. The Freudian shadow becomes in the Kleinian transcription *objects* which are "inside" as balls in a box. Both Lacanism and Ego Psychology—Even if taking opposite directions—share at least the need to dis-ontologize the Freudian reference to the inner reality (Lacan, for example, stresses the idea that the unconscious is not something "internal, deep" but rather something "outside, superficial", which one can describe by a way of spatial topology). This is why philosophers are mostly attracted by Lacanism and Ego-Psychology, and almost never by Object Relation Theory. With Kleinism, on the contrary, all philosophical doubts fall, and the interior life is described as a "real" theatre full of objects and actions. While in Freud's theory we can consider all the "interior" references as metaphors, in Kleinism every metaphorical shadow becomes literal. In this sense, as a philosopher I always felt that Kleinian interpretations were even more delirious than their patients' beliefs and fantasies.

This impression is confirmed by the Kleinian clinical style, which I always found dogmatic in its overwhelming habit to interpret everything in a very crude fashion. Now, the most sensitive analysts try to interpret less and less, but Kleinism represents a backlash towards heavy "interpretationism". Let me cite just one example out of possible thousands. In her article on the little Fritz in 1921 (we now know that Fritz was in fact her own son, Hans), the boy recounts to her his fantasy: the professor, while standing in front of his students, leaned on his desk, capsized it, fell down on it, smashed it and was hurt. Without any other association, his mother-analyst interprets quickly the professor as his father, the desk as his mother, and the accident as a sadistic conception of the coitus. I am not saying that this interpretation is absurd, but I was always shocked by its directness, devoid of any doubt, nuance or uncertainty. A Kleinian analyst is a very quick and smart simultaneous translator from the language of the unconscious to Kleinese. A certain self-ironical edge, always present in Freud's interpretations, is here completely lost: without any incertitude, the analyst over-interprets everything according to a very reduced vocabulary (that is, everything is translated in terms of mother and father having an intercourse, breast, penis, aggressive drives, retaliation, and a few other items). This is why for philosophers Kleinism appears as a sort of caricature of Freudianism.

You say that a Kleinian claims "*that the child's subjective states manifest themselves in all kinds of publicly observable ways*": but how can one argue that Fritz's fantasy manifests exactly the subjective state Klein describes? A Kleinian does not infer a mental state by a manifest behavior—as when we infer rage from a red engorged face—but s/he heavily *interprets* a manifest behavior according to an interpretative (and rigid) code. As Wittgenstein stated in his conversations with Rush Rhees, the interpretation of a meaning through some manifest text of behavior—as the analyst does—is never a genuine explanation, and this is why analytic interpretations are incommensurable with any natural science.

It is true that Kleinians recommend "child observations"; the point is *what to observe* in children. Child observation is filtered through the Kleinian theoretical network, but of course thousands of other kinds of observations are possible. Even opposing theories claim to have their own empirical grounds, but the problem is the way in which to interpret the empirical data.

In conclusion, for a philosopher the fact that Kleinism (as part of "object relations theory") is now well

accepted in the US is both positive and negative. Positive because it means that US psychoanalysis—after so many years of heavy Ego-psychology exclusivity—is finally becoming open and very sensitive to currents coming from Europe. Negative because it is perhaps a further sign of the crisis of psychoanalysis in America: Kleinism in fact pushes to the limit precisely what is now less and less accepted by the public, an over-interpretative *sound and fury* which has ridiculized analytic work.

## 2.

I am in touch with many colleagues who work in child psychology field: I can report that they don't care at all about psychoanalytic categories! What matters in current child psychology is the child's explicit behavior, all the better if rigorously measured; researchers forbid themselves to interpret, guess, suppose, or hypothesize something unconscious (or "subjective", as a Lacanian romantically would say). Psychoanalysis is "romantic" because it is based on interpretation (like a literary critic proposing a new interpretation of some classical drama), which means that a piece of behavior is always read as "something else" than its literal meaning. Dora dreams that her house is on fire, and Freud says, "the fire is your sexual desire"; the Rat Man has the impulse to throw himself into the void from a rock, and Freud tells him, "you wished to kill not yourself but your rival Dick". What a psychoanalyst calls unconscious is his decision to not take behavioral features literally, and this decision contrasts sharply with scientific procedures as they are applied today in psychology research.

There is an increasing separation between developmental psychology and the psychoanalytic theory of the child—this separation is not something I like, but it is a sheer fact. This means that your reference to empirical research here misses the point of HOW to deal with empirical data. Psychoanalysis certainly is also empirical—as are many arts, techniques and political activities, although not scientific because of that. In fact its method of analyzing empirical data is divergent from today's established scientific research. A positivist and rationalistic conception, such as that of Carnap or Popper—according to which only that which comes from scientific methodologies can be considered significant or true—today rejects psychoanalysis. Unfortunately one must choose between being a positivist materialist, or a Freudian sympathizer. I try to show in my paper that being both is impossible today.

I agree that Castoriadis should not be a model for psychoanalysts (I have no sympathy for his arrogance). But to date, I have found the psychoanalytic responses to philosophical arguments against psychoanalysis (by Popper, Grünbaum, Bouveresse, Cioffi, even Crews, etc.) to be generally unconvincing, naive or irrelevant.

## 3.

Certainly in this case my style was misleading: when I evoked a public game, a village fair, I meant to stress *the public character* of the scientific activity, not its futility! In fact, a village fair is something completely public, involving a whole community. (What matters in science is *the community of researchers* of a given scientific field.) When I call science "a game", using Wittgenstein's expression, I don't wish to hint that scientific statements are arbitrary, but rather that the scientist applies certain rules, as happens in many games (even those played in village fairs).

I don't understand other objections of yours. Do you want to object to the fact that scientific hypotheses are based on probability? This is not my idea, but the hard core of Viennese empiricism, according to which only mathematical and logical statements are *certain* because they are analytic, while scientific hypotheses are only more or less *likely* (more or less probable) because they are synthetic statements. Even "*biochemical truths*" are not at all certainties for a real empiricist: biochemical laws are just a bet on the future on the ground of observed regularities. Quine (disappeared in December 2000) destroyed this basic empiricist idea, but not even according to him are scientific statements certain. This is why science changes, develops: previous "truths" are relativized or refuted.

According to the Private Language Argument, we can't have an objective knowledge of our subjectivity as such, because private feelings are not "objects" offered to knowledge. Of course, we can have a scientific psychology, but only about others' publicly controllable behaviors. I cannot have a science about myself, only about others (where I am included, but only as "other" than what I feel as myself). A science of

subjectivity is a contradiction in terms (I don't say that I agree with this approach, but this is the conclusion of Wittgenstein's PLA).

All commentators on Wittgenstein's thought agree that the PLA's genuine inspiration is anti-Cartesian: Descartes based all knowledge on the inner certitude of the "I think" evidence, while Wittgenstein says that the inner evidence of one's mind provides no basis for any real knowledge. Public behavior, and not an inner feeling of certitude, provides the grounds for a science of the human mind, according to Wittgenstein.

#### 4.

Where do I say that "historical science = fiction"? I say something completely different: that psychoanalytic explanations (and not historical science!) are fictions, exactly because psychoanalysis is not an explanatory science. For example, I believe astrologists' pretension to explain something about your life's story through the stars is a fiction, not the life's story itself.

#### 5.

Grünbaum mainly tries to refute what, according to him, is given by Freud as the argument of the scientific validity of psychoanalysis. Grünbaum calls "Thesis of the Necessary Condition" the conjunction of the two following Freudian statements:

1. Only the psychoanalytic interpretation and treatment can produce or constitute the medium for the patient's correct insight on the unconscious causes of his neurosis
2. The patient's correct insight of the conflictual cause constituting the source of his present condition, or on the unconscious dynamics of his character, is in its turn causally necessary for a long-lasting cure of his neurosis.

I won't discuss here whether Grünbaum's reconstruction of Freud's thought is correct. In any case, his refutation of this thesis is based on showing how the conjunction of these two conditions is not actual. In particular, Grünbaum does not deny that psychoanalysis can successfully heal some neuroses (at least, psychoanalysis's possible impotence in achieving a cure is not part of his argument), he denies that Freud ever demonstrated that the healing, when it does occur, is the causal effect of a psychoanalytically correct insight. As you see, the relevance of the healing capacity of psychoanalysis is essential to his argument.

#### 6.

You are right, the passage is too rough. But my argument tries to show that Miller's approach is still "objectivist": his idea is that the analyst has to show the subject's real objective structure.

#### 7.

You quote object relations theory, attachment theory and Kohutian analysis: they are all included in IPA. But what about non-IPA approaches, like Jungians, Lacanians, Fromm-Sullivanians, Adlerians, Cognitivists, Gestaltists, etc.? The key for communication among analysts seems to be the common inclusion in a bureaucratic institution, and not something deeper.

In the 1940s in London, Anna-Freudians and Kleinians reached a "gentlemen's agreement" which was rather a "ladies' agreement" and Kleinians remained in the IPA. If they had split, you can be sure that there would now be no communication between the "orthodox analysts" and the Kleinians. And there is no longer any communication with Lacanians, because Lacan was excluded from the IPA. I know many British analysts who belong to the same (formal) British Society, although they were trained in one of the three different training programs (Freudian, Kleinian and Independent) existing within the British Society: I can assure you that very few are concerned about what the "others" (of the two other schools) do and say. Of course, in official international journals they pretend to communicate, but is it at a deep level? I am afraid that your image of contemporary psychoanalysis is idealized and reassuring, but far from reality.

In fact, actual scientific journals are not identified by their scientific trend. Among scientists, there is no equivalent to Miller-Lacanian, anti-Miller Lacanian, IPA, Jungian, etc., journals. I am not saying that the scientific community is better than the psychoanalytic one: I am just stressing that they are *very different* in their communication structure.

## 8.

I don't infer this conclusion for the simple reason that it is the ABCs of all hermeneutic philosophies. I would say that the rejection of any objective knowledge on human beings is *the very definition* of hermeneutics. The major work on which hermeneutics is based—Heidegger's *Time and Being*—is absolutely clear on this point: *Dasein*, the human *being-there*, is not a kind of "fact" on which to base a knowledge, because the *Dasein* is transcendental project, possibility, being-for, nothing objectifiable (except in unauthentic alienation). Of course, even the hermeneutical philosopher aims at telling the truth, but this truth is not identified with the truths enunciated by any objective knowledge (as "adequacy of the discourse to the thing").

## 9.

Maybe the verb "affirms" is not clear here. This is the Hegelian assumption in hermeneutics: that truth is always historical. An Hegelian hermeneutical philosopher does not take into account any objective truth of things independent from the history of ideas and "life worlds". To the extreme, Copernicanism matters to him not for having discovered an eternal truth about the sun and the planets (even if hermeneutics does not deny this objective truth), but for marking a specific epoch of human being-in-the-world, when Man placed himself as an object of knowledge for himself. Truth—for Hegelianism—is never independent from history, it is always "timely". This means that every conception prevailing in a certain epoch is historically "the truth". This is why some hermeneutical philosophers are attacked as nihilist and relativist. The most important Italian hermeneutical philosopher, Gianni Vattimo, wrote that truth today is Marxian, Nietzschean, Wittgensteinian, Freudian, because our time is (or was?) Marxian, Nietzschean, etc. (for example, Gianni Vattimo, *Oltre l'interpretazione* [Rome: Laterza 1994] I find it just sheer conformism. The point is that our epoch was and is *not only* Marxian, Nietzschean, Wittgensteinian, Freudian but *also* highly anti-Marxian, anti-Nietzschean, anti-Freudian, etc. This clash interests me, rather than the epochal *Weltgeist*.

I thank you very much for having given me the opportunity to answer to objections to my text and of clarifying some misunderstandings.

*Sergio Benvenuto*