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Lacan on Personality from the 1930s to the 1950s

Summary:

The concept of personality plays an important polemical role in Lacan's early work, where he stresses the importance of psychological as opposed to biological determinants of mental illness. He defines personality at that point in time as a diachronic self-conception that evolves in tension with other people, it being a shorthand term in his vocabulary for the psyche. By the time he comments on Lagache's work (1958), he indicates that those who concern themselves with "personality" are taken in by the lure of wholeness, succumbing to the illusion that a person is or becomes a unified whole. Lacan instead emphasizes the mask-like quality of personality, relying on Lévi-Strauss's work to undermine the notion that a psychoanalytic topography could allow us to conceptualize a person as unitary. Lacan's work on Gide and Reich provide a number of other points regarding masks and so-called personality.