Après Coup: A Debate

Editorial Note

The response by Jamieson Webster e Marcus Coelen to one of our 12 Questions—

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

Addressed to psychoanalysts and philosophers on the relationship between psychoanalysis and philosophy—raised the question of après-coup, one of the most overlooked, complex, and controversial of Freudian concepts, originally referred to as Nachträglichkeit. A concept for which no satisfying translation has ever been found in any language. A concept which has been revisited on psychoanalytic ground over the last decades by Jean Laplanche and more recently Sergio Benvenuto. The concept—as recouped by Jacques Lacan around the notion of retroactivity—revealed a critical theoretical potential capable of upsetting all of what has been constructed in psychoanalysis around the idea of a linear one-directional timeframe from the past to the future, and has proven to be crucial to the most relevant questions within psychoanalytic theorising. The history of Nachträglichkeit, as considered by diverse authors, shows how the very meaning of psychoanalysis is at stake.

By bringing to the forefront the question of après-coup, Webster and Coelen have reconstructed significant moments in the history, interpretations, and re-readings of the concept, concerning the role played by various authors after Freud. At the same time, they have opened the question on the reactions of the so-called psychoanalytic establishment with respect to this concept; in particular, they make a critical reference to an article on this topic by Jonathan House published in the Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association in 2018, with the subsequent publication of House’s response and Webster and Coehlen’s further reply, as well as Patricia Gherovici’s clarification. As a result, we decided to open a special section on our website for the debate surrounding après-coup.

Taking advantage of this special section, we publish here a 1989 conversation on Après-coup between J.-B. Pontalis and Sergio Benvenuto.

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