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5

Hegel, Heidegger, Lacan: The Dialectic of Desire

EDWARD S. CASEY AND J. MELVIN WOODY

Psychoanalysis is constantly tempted by reductionism. That temptation stems from the desire to establish psychology on a genuinely "scientific" basis and to attain the rigor of the natural sciences by explaining the human in terms of the nonhuman. If all dimensions of human mental life could be translated into the terms of the sciences of nature, the recognizably human would be reduced to something already explained by "real" sciences such as physics and biology. The danger, of course, is that we may no longer recognize ourselves in the image which results—that the peculiarly human will somehow be lost in the reducing glass.

Freud himself was an eloquent spokesman for such a strategy. The opening of his "Project for a Scientific Psychology" provides a classic statement of this reductionist program:

The intention [of this project] is to furnish a psychology that shall be a natural science: that is, to represent psychical processes as quantitatively determinate states of specifiable material particles, thus making those processes perspicuous and free from contradiction. Two principal ideas are involved: (1) What distinguishes activity from rest is to be regarded as *Q* [quantity], subject to the general laws of motion. (2) The neurones are to be taken as the material particles. [1895, p. 295]

Although this essay is a collaborative effort, the primary responsibility for the section on Hegel belongs to J. M. Woody and that on Heidegger to E. S. Casey.

Freud soon abandoned this neurophysiological program and declared forthrightly that, henceforth, "I shall remain upon psychological ground" (1900–01, p. 536). But similar reductionist motives remain prominent in his works, where the neuron's role as a naturalistic explanatory principle is supplanted by the conception of instinct or drive (*Trieb*) as a form of biological energy. The ambitions of the 1895 "Project" still echo in *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, posthumously published in 1938, where Freud declares that psychology is "a natural science like any other" (p. 158). In the light of such statements, it is easy to interpret Freudian psychoanalysis as a form of reductionist psychology that attempts to resolve everything human into a biological substrate of instinctual energies.

Jacques Lacan proposes an audacious alternative to this reductionist interpretation of Freud. He argues that what is central to Freud's view is not his official materialism, but a theory of symbolism. Lacan would thus substitute linguistics for biology as the scientific foundation and model for psychoanalysis, thereby ensuring that the human will be understood in terms of the human, since language is a uniquely human achievement. It is this proposal—that linguistics replace biology as the scientific paradigm for psychoanalysis—which links Lacan with the French structuralist school.

But if Lacan offers us an alternative to reductionistic versions of Freud and of psychoanalysis, it is not only because of his emphasis upon linguistics. It is also because his view is profoundly influenced by the philosophies of Heidegger and Hegel and, even more specifically, by Alexandre Kojève's provocative interpretation of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which had such a major impact upon French thinkers of Lacan's generation. Indeed, the influences of Heidegger and Hegel converge in Kojève, whose interpretation of Hegel's *Phenomenology* exhibits an original and exciting blend of Marxist and Heideggerian ingredients. Since many readers of Lacan are not familiar with Heidegger or Hegel, still less with Kojève's version of the *Phenomenology*, Lacan's Heideggerian allusions and frequent references to Hegel only aggravate the difficulty of wrestling with his hermetic prose style.

We will try to alleviate this difficulty by presenting some of the most salient ideas of Hegel and Heidegger that are important to understanding Lacan. Our purpose is not merely to clarify Lacan by tracing historical influences, however. We will also attempt to show how Lacan's assimilation of Hegel and Heidegger invites a reconsideration of the founding insights of Sigmund Freud in a less reductionistic way. Reductionism will give way to a dialectic that leads to a psychoanalysis no longer regarded, or regardable, as anything like a natural science.

Hegel

Lacan claims to be an orthodox Freudian, championing Freud's authentic meaning against the challenge of French phenomenology and the heretical ego psychology of the American Freudians. He attacks both the transparency of consciousness in Sartre's existential phenomenology and the primacy of the ego in American psychoanalytic theory, insisting that the ego is not the locus of truth and reality and autonomous control, but is rather a concretion of illusions, a source of "méconnaisances" or "misrecognitions" that must be dissolved in the course of psychoanalysis in order to liberate the authentic self, the "je" or "I."

Lacan finds Hegel a natural ally in these quarrels because Hegel, too, is a critic of consciousness and of the ego—not of ego psychology, of course, but of the ego-centered philosophies that have dominated modern European thought. These include Descartes's rational *cogito*, the introspective consciousness of English empiricism, and the autonomous, transcendental ego of Kant and Fichte. All are misconceptions insofar as they are founded in the idea of a purely epistemological ego—or "thinking being." For they thereby abstract not only from human activity and labor but also from the social, cultural, and historical conditions of human mentality. Thus, Kojève describes the program of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* somewhat dramatically by depicting it as Hegel's attempt to understand himself—not as a disembodied ego or Cartesian *cogito*, but as he sits at a table in Jena in 1806, writing the *Phenomenology* and hearing, in the distance, the cannon shots on the eve of the Battle of Jena, in which Napoleon defeated

Prussia. To understand himself, Hegel must understand what it is to philosophize at that historic moment, in a world in which Napoleon is about to end the Holy Roman Empire which Charlemagne had begun a thousand years before. But, Kojève asks,

What is it to "understand" Napoleon? . . . Generally speaking, to understand Napoleon is to understand him in relation to the whole of anterior historical evolution, to understand the whole of universal history. Now, almost none of the philosophers contemporary with Hegel posed this problem for himself. And none of them, except Hegel, resolved it. For Hegel is the only one able to accept, and to justify, Napoleon's existence. . . . The others consider themselves obliged to condemn Napoleon, that is, to condemn the historical *reality*; and their philosophical systems—by that very fact—are all condemned by that reality. [Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, pp. 34–35; Kojève's italics]

These philosophers condemn Napoleon—and thereby themselves—because the abstract purity of the epistemological ego has been translated into a moralizing "beautiful soul" so obsessed with the purity of its own intentions that it does not *act*, but only passes judgment upon those who do—and of course Napoleon is the preeminent historic agent of the era. These philosophers are all words and no deeds, and by their very opposition to historical reality they show that their words are empty abstractions. They fail to understand Napoleon, as they fail to understand themselves, because they do not recognize that their abstract conception of themselves and Napoleon are both products of the culture of the Enlightenment, and that their condemnation of history is merely the verbal counterpart of what the Revolution and Napoleon are actively realizing by the destruction of the old order and the Holy Roman Empire. To understand Napoleon they would have to acknowledge this underlying identity of self and other, give up their abstract moralistic purity, and accept their own historicity.

Hegel insists that the individual who fails to recognize his own historicity and sets himself up as a pure, autonomous ego, inde-

pendent of the customs and culture of his society and era, is a stranger to himself. Much of the work of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* is intended to dissolve such an illusory conception of the self as an abstract ego and bring the self-estranged consciousness to a full recognition of itself as both creature and creator of history. It is an enterprise that may well be compared with psychoanalysis and with Lacan's attack upon the ego as a source of mis-recognition and the alienation of the authentic subject. The easiest way to exhibit the Hegelian background of Lacan's view is to explore the parallel between these two programs for rescuing the self from its estrangement, or its "captivation by the ego," in Lacan's phrase.

The point of departure for Hegel's critique of ego philosophies is his analysis of consciousness, which culminates in a critique of the sort of naive scientific thinker who seeks to contemplate an objective world uncontaminated by subjectivity. This thinker still does not recognize that the mind plays an active role in knowledge, that the scientific object is a reflection of the scientific subject. The account ends with a strange passage on "die verkehrte Welt," an inverted, mirror world in which all scientific polarities are reversed—rather like speculations about a universe of anti-matter in recent physics. Hegel carries this out to comic lengths to emphasize that the scientific consciousness must recognize itself in this mirror in order to get beyond mere consciousness and reach the level of self-consciousness. But self-consciousness emerges only if it is not nature that is the object of consciousness, but rather another self. Hegel therefore turns to the origins of consciousness in the relation to an alter ego:

Self-consciousness is faced by another self-consciousness; it has come *out of itself*. This has a twofold significance: first, it has lost itself, for it finds itself as an *other* being; secondly, in doing so it has superseded the other, for it does not see the other as an essential being, but in the other sees its own self. [p. 111; Hegel's italics]

This image of the emergence of self-consciousness from the recognition of the self in a mirror, or in another self, is familiar to readers of Lacan. The point of departure for Lacan's critique of

ego psychology is his account of "the mirror stage"—the stage when the infant, still uncoordinated and relatively powerless, first achieves consciousness of itself by recognizing itself in an object outside itself, its image in a mirror. According to Lacan, this specular, mirror image of the self is "the matrix and first outline of what is to become the ego,"¹ and since it shows the body in reversed form, it presages the ego's role as a source of misrecognition and illusion.

What is not to be found in the looking glass, according to both Hegel and Lacan, is any awareness of self as subjective agency. The two agree that what the mirror does not reflect is the subject's *desire*, which is the motive source of all human activity and is the simplest, most primitive form of self-awareness. Kojève explains that

the man who attentively *contemplates* a thing, who wants to see it as it is without changing anything is "absorbed" so to speak by this contemplation—that is, by this thing. He forgets himself. . . . [But] when he experiences a desire, when he is hungry, for example, and wants to eat . . . he necessarily becomes aware of *himself*. Desire is always revealed as *my* desire. [p. 37; Kojève's italics]

In contrast to the knowledge that keeps man in a passive quietude, Desire disquiets him and moves him to action. [p. 4]

Thus far, Lacan could concur on purely Freudian grounds—and might defend his orthodoxy with references to Freud's discussions of Eros and Thanatos and the economics of the libido. But what Lacan in fact does is to take over Hegel's analysis of desire as interpreted and elaborated by Kojève. Hegel's analysis focuses upon what distinguishes *human* desire from merely vital, biological drives. If Lacan's version of Freudian theory and practice offers an alternative to reductionism, it is as much the result of this adoption of Hegel's analysis of desire as it is of the linguis-

¹ Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), pp. 250–52. For Lacan's own formulation, see *Écrits*, pp. 1–7.

tic theory of the unconscious. Indeed, the linguistic and Hegelian themes may be regarded as necessary complements of one another. Paul Ricoeur objects to Lacan's interpretation of Freud because it "eliminates energy concepts in favor of linguistics" (p. 367, n. 37). By insisting upon a linguistic or semiotic theory of the unconscious, Ricoeur argues, Lacan and his followers are led to neglect the energetic, biological dimension of Freud's theory, the "economics" of the libido. But, Ricoeur insists, it is just this natural, energetic ingredient that is required to explain the difference between ordinary language and the symbolism of the unconscious. Ricoeur regards this as the critical juncture for the philosophical interpretation of Freud:

For a philosophical critique, the essential point concerns what I call the place of that energy discourse. Its place, it seems to me, lies at the intersection of desire and language. . . . The intersection of the 'natural' and the 'signifying' is the point at which the instinctual drives are 'represented' by affects and ideas; consequently the coordination of the economic language and the intentional language is the main question of this epistemology and one that cannot be avoided by reducing either language to the other. [p. 395]

But, Ricoeur admits, the difficulty here centers in "the idea of an 'energy that is transformed into meaning.'" And he concedes that in order to resolve this difficulty, "it may be that the entire matter must be redone, perhaps with the help of energy schemata quite different from Freud's" (p. 395).

It is at just this point, "the intersection of the 'natural' and the 'signifying,'" that Lacan's adoption of Hegel's account of human desire plays such a decisive role. The linguistic interpretation of the unconscious seems to call for a complementary redefinition of desire in less naturalistic terms than those afforded by Freud's "energy discourse." Hegel's discussion of desire in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* supplies this complement by focusing upon how human desire transcends biological needs and organic drives. And if Ricoeur is correct in claiming that psychoanalysis is essentially a "hermeneutics of desire," then the adoption of the

Hegelian theory of desire is bound to have important implications for both the theory and the practice of the interpretation of the "language" of the unconscious. Kojève's elaboration of Hegel's analysis of desire might almost have been designed to address this enigma of how "energy is transformed into meaning" in a way that pertains directly to the problem of interpretation as it appears within the interpersonal setting of analysis.

In his commentary upon Hegel's discussion of desire, Kojève explains that the very being of man implies and presupposes a biological reality, an animal life and animal desire. But,

if animal Desire is the necessary condition of Self-Consciousness, it is not the sufficient condition. [p. 4]

The animal attains only *Selbst-gefühl*, *Sentiment* of self, but not *Selbst-bewusstsein*, *Self-Consciousness*—that is, it cannot speak of itself, it cannot say "I." . . . For Self-Consciousness to exist . . . there must be transcendence of self with respect to self as *given*. And this is possible, according to Hegel, only if desire is directed not toward a *given* being, but toward a *nonbeing* . . . that is, toward another Desire, another greedy emptiness, another I. . . . Desire is human—or, more exactly, "humanizing," "anthropogenetic"—only provided that it is directed toward another *Desire* and an *other* *Desire*. [pp. 39–40; Kojève's italics]

Thus, in the relationship between a man and a woman, for example, Desire is human only if the one desires, not the body, but the Desire of the other; if he wants "to possess" or "to assimilate" the Desire taken as Desire—that is to say, if he wants to be "desired" or "loved," or, rather, "recognized" in his human value, in his reality as a human individual. [p. 6]

Lacan takes up this analysis and elaborates it into a three-way distinction between *desire*; merely natural or biological *need*, which is mute; and *demand*, which is that peculiarly human demand for love that transcends all mere objects of satisfaction and transmutes them into proofs of love. Lacan reserves the word "desire" to refer to that transcendent, unconditional ingredient

in the demand for love, the peculiarly human emptiness that cannot be satisfied by any object or proof of love. As Lacan puts it, "for both partners in the relation, both the subject and the Other, it is not enough to be subjects of need, or objects of love. . . . They must stand for the cause of desire" (*Écrits*, p. 287). So, Lacan explains, "if the desire of the mother is the phallus, the child wishes to be the phallus in order to satisfy that desire" (p. 289). And elsewhere he elaborates:

The child, in his relation to the mother, a relation constituted in analysis not by his vital dependence on her, but by his dependence on her love, that is to say, by the desire for her desire, identifies himself with the imaginary object of this desire in so far as the mother herself symbolizes it in the phallus. [*Écrits*, p. 198]

Lacan's understanding of the significance of the phallus is crucial here. The phallus is not the physical organ, the penis or clitoris, but the symbolic object whose unveiling culminated the ancient mysteries. Lacan insists upon this special symbolic status: "The phallus is the privileged signifier of that mark in which the role of the logos is joined with the advent of desire (1977, p. 287). The phallus thus stands at that "intersection of desire and language" which Ricoeur describes as the philosophically critical crossroads of psychoanalytic theory. For Lacan, it marks the transcendence of human desire beyond organic need—a transcendence that is owing to language. It also stands for *jouissance*, that unconditional fulfillment or perfection of being which is the aim of a human desire that cannot be satisfied by any object because "the being of language is the non-being of objects" (p. 263). In effect, the phallus is the symbol of that movement whereby man surpasses the merely vital or biological toward a fulfillment that is forever wanted—and forever wanting—in human existence.

Hegel, too, had insisted that this distinctively human desire to be desired aims beyond every determinate need and seems even to defy any form of satisfaction. It is a desire to be desired as a desirer; not simply to satisfy a *need*, nor as an object of *love*, as Lacan says, but as a human subject who transcends every object or

instinct or merely vital need. But an individual can only prove to the other that he *is* such a transcending subject by risking his life in conflict with another subject. Kojève explains:

For man to be truly human, for him to be essentially and really different from an animal, his human Desire must actually win out over his animal Desire. . . . All the Desires of an animal are in the final analysis a function of its desire to preserve its life. Human Desire, therefore, must win out over this desire for preservation . . . [pp. 6–7.] In other words, Man will risk his biological life to satisfy his *nonbiological* desire. And Hegel says that the being that is incapable of putting its life in danger in order to attain ends that are not immediately vital—i.e., the being that cannot risk its life in a fight for *Recognition*, in a fight for pure *prestige*—is *not* a truly human being. [p. 41; his italics]

But one cannot extract recognition from a corpse! A struggle to the death can only end in impasse. If the struggle is to have any positive result, one of the two adversaries must surrender, abnegate his own desire in order to save his life and become a slave who labors to satisfy the desire of the other, the master. But the master cannot be fully satisfied by the recognition of a mere slave who has sacrificed his human autonomy to save his life. *Self-consciousness* is achieved only through consciousness of another self, an alter ego, and the master cannot encounter a fully human self in the slave. It is only the slave who encounters in the master, as his alter ego, a fully autonomous human being. But this otherness must be overcome; the self must recognize itself in its other. The master must acknowledge his dependence upon the slave, and the slave must recognize his own mastery. In fact, it is the slave who, by means of his labor, may eventually achieve satisfaction and recognition. The slave alters and reshapes the world through his work and thereby realizes and embodies his own subjective agency in the world. He can therefore *recognize* himself in that world. By laboring to satisfy the desire of the other, then, the slave *works through* his natural fear of death and realizes his freedom by mastering the natural world, thereby achieving self-recognition.

Lacan applies this analysis of the struggle for recognition and the master-slave relation to the development of the child and to the psychoanalytic process. The child desires to be desired—desires, symbolically, to *be* the phallus which the mother desires. But he must repress this desire under the prohibition of the paternal “No,” or as Lacan puts it “in the Name of the Father,” which signifies the socialization of the child, the acquisition of language, law, and culture whereby the individual becomes human. This subordination of desire to law and language is the locus of primal repression. The threat of castration is simply the apt symbol for this abnegation of the desire to be desired, symbolized by the desire to be the phallus. Lacan also finds here the source of the necessity which led Freud to “link the appearance of the signifier of the Father, as author of the Law, with death, even to the murder of the Father” (*Écrits*, p. 199).

Thus, according to Lacan, there is a “life and death struggle” at the origin of individual acculturation much like that which Hegel saw as the precondition of all human history. In both cases, this struggle leaves the desire for recognition unsatisfied, and the subsequent development—whether of the career of the individual or the history of the species—is plagued by tensions that betray the unresolved conflict whence it springs. Lacan writes:

The concrete field of individual preservation . . . is structured in this dialectic of master and slave, in which we can recognize the symbolic emergence of the imaginary struggle to the death in which we earlier defined the essential structure of the ego. [*Écrits*, p. 142]

Lacan sees this same dialectic in psychoanalytic transference. He frequently characterizes the analytic relationship in just these Hegelian terms, describing it as a struggle for recognition or as a master-slave relation in which the analysand assumes the role of the slave, who agrees initially to undertake the “work” of analysis in order to satisfy the analyst-master. If the process is to be fruitful, however, the analyst must eventually eschew the role of master and help the analysand toward self-recognition through the labor of free association, thereby freeing an authentic “I” from captivity by the ego.

Of course, all of this must be taken metaphorically. In Lacan's case, nothing should be taken too literally—and Lacan himself remarks that Hegel's account describes "a mythical rather than a real genesis" (*Écrits*, p. 308). It is probably best to see Hegel's analysis of the struggle for recognition and the master-slave dialectic as his substitute for the Enlightenment's myth of the origin of human civilization in a social contract between autonomous, rationally self-interested egos. Kojève treats this dialectic as a metaphor for the whole of human history, in which the labor of the slave corresponds to the historical process of *Bildung*, or culture-building, wherein man both creates and alienates himself:

The historical process, the historical becoming of the human being, is the product of the working Slave and not of the warlike Master. . . . Thanks to his work, *he* can become other; and thanks to his work, the *World* can become other. And this is what actually took place as universal history and, finally, the French Revolution and Napoleon show. [pp. 52–53]

And that brings us back to the beginning, to Hegel's effort to understand himself as he writes, hearing the sounds of Napoleon's cannon at Jena, and to his attempt to help the reader overcome his self-estrangement by appropriating his own historicity, recognizing himself as both creature and creator of history. It is, again, an undertaking which invites comparison with psychoanalysis, especially as Lacan describes it: "Analysis can have for its goal only the advent of a true speech and the realization by the subject of his history in his relation to a future" (*Écrits*, p. 88).

Yet for all the fertile parallels Lacan discovers between psychoanalysis and the program of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, the two enterprises are not the same, and he is well aware of how they differ. In Hegel's case, the task of reconciliation with his own historical reality requires an understanding of the whole of world history, or at least of how the history of the West has led to the confrontation between the German intellectual and the Napoleonic armies. Only the philosophical comprehension of the history that culminates in Napoleon will yield such self-understanding and recon-

ciliation. Self-knowledge is not to be attained through the simple transparency of the Cartesian *cogito* or Kant's transcendental unity of apperception, for man is not an enduring substance, knowable through the contemplation of some timeless essential attributes. Man is a free agent and he cannot know *what* he is until he acts, since he constitutes himself through acting upon and altering his world. Man's essence is defined by his history, by what he has done, and that means that he can only come to know himself by alienating or othering himself, by building himself a world and then recognizing himself in that world of culture and history, understood as the product of his human deeds.

But the individual who fully recognizes all this, and understands that history is a human creation, is himself no longer a mere creature of history. That individual, of course, is Hegel himself. By fully understanding his own historicity, Hegel claims to transcend it, not by ascending to a realm of Platonic Ideas, nor by escaping into a timeless mystic unity, but precisely by insisting that man's freedom makes him radically temporal and historical; and yet to understand this history is to transcend it in a knowledge that is absolute because it grasps the truth of all the antecedent forms of consciousness and culture, and knows itself to be the product of those forms. It thereby comprehends the whole of history within itself. So, Hegel concludes,

Spirit necessarily appears in Time, and it appears in Time just so long as it has not *grasped* its pure Notion, i.e., has not annulled Time Time, therefore, appears as the destiny and necessity of Spirit that is not yet complete within itself, the necessity to enrich the share which self-consciousness has in consciousness. [*Phenomenology*, p. 487]

Hegelian phenomenology and Lacanian psychoanalysis part company here. For Lacan would forswear such a claim to absolute knowledge, emphasizing that the analyst must abjure any comparable assertion of omniscience. And this is surely not because of any modesty on Lacan's part, but because of his conviction that there is no final insight or definitive version of truth to be had. If Lacan nevertheless acknowledges the radical historicity and tem-

porality of human existence by insisting upon the roles of language, law, and culture in the constitution of the individual subject, he must avail himself of a different conception of human temporality, historicity, and culture than Hegel's. He found such an alternative conception ready to hand in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger.

Heidegger

For Lacan the human subject is something more than ego and even more than consciousness. At one point, Lacan is tempted to connect his view of the subject with Descartes's insofar as both seek certainty in the midst of doubt: "The subject," says Lacan, is always "looking for his certainty" (*Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 129). He is a subject who is "supposed to know" (*le sujet supposé à savoir*: "posited as in the know") but who does *not* know because of the misunderstandings and mystifications in which he or she is embroiled in the imaginary register that begins with the infant's captivation by its reflection in the mirror. But it is just here that the parallel with Descartes collapses. For the Cartesian subject achieves certainty by recognizing its being through self-reflection, and can be defined with metaphysical precision as a *res cogitans*, an undivided thinking substance—whereas the subject of (and in) psychoanalysis has "wider bases" and is radically indeterminate: a subject always "split" and "fading" from itself in self-division (cf. *Four Concepts*, p. 126; *Écrits*, pp. 299, 313).

There are various sources of such splitting of the subject. They include the intrinsic incommensurabilities between the repressing and the repressed elements of the self, the signifier and the signified, language and speech, self and other, ego and Other. This split and divided condition of the subject, which Lacan signifies by the symbol \$, means that the immediate reflective certainty of the Cartesian *cogito* is an illusion, a mis-recognition. And as this cleavage in the self is radical, it cannot be transcended or reconciled through the mediated self-recognition of Hegelian absolute knowledge.

Does this mean, as some have suspected, that the Lacanian

subject can be neither known nor defined? In fact, there are at least three ways to define this subject, all of which are explicitly philosophical and each of which contributes to an understanding of its radically divided character.

THE EFFECTS OF THE SIGNIFIER

The subject for Lacan is a speaking subject—or rather, a *spoken* subject, created by the play of the signifier. Instead of being a source of causal efficacy (as it is in nearly all substantialist/personalist views), the subject is to be regarded as an effect—indeed, the primary effect—of speaking. And it is precisely at this juncture that the unconscious enters the scene:

One should see in the unconscious the effects of speech on the subject—insofar as these effects are so radically primary that they are properly what determine the status of the subject as subject The unconscious is the sum of the effects of speech on a subject, at the level at which the subject constitutes himself out of the effects of the signifier. [*Four Concepts*, p. 126]

For all of the obvious origins of such a statement in Saussure, Jakobson, and Lévi-Strauss, each of whom offers evidence of the massive "effects of the signifier," it is also rooted in the philosophy of Heidegger, who has insisted on the primacy of language over the speaking subject in his extremely condensed formula, "language speaks" (*die Sprache spricht*). At best, human beings can serve only to guard and preserve the truth thus spoken. At worst, and more typically, they may abandon authentic meaning and subjectivity in a life dominated by the cliché and by everyday gossip. David Riesman once epitomized the heteronomy of such a life by describing it as "other-directed." Heidegger expresses the same theme by saying that this inauthentic, everyday subject is not *myself*, but the impersonal "one" (*das Man*, the equivalent of the French *on*).

Lacan articulates this theme by speaking of the dominance of the Other. In the last section of his 1957 essay "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious," entitled "The Letter, Being and the

Other," he speaks of "the radical heteronomy that Freud's discovery [of the unconscious] shows gaping within man" and of "this other to whom I am more attached than to myself" (*Écrits*, p. 172). This "Other," which Lacan distinguishes from any particular other by capitalization ("le grand Autre"), is not distinguishable from the signifying chain of speech in which it manifests itself in psychoanalysis; indeed, it is "the locus of the signifier" (p. 310). Hence Lacan's celebrated dictum, "The unconscious is the discourse of the Other" (p. 172). The unconscious is structured *as* a language because, and to the exact extent that, it is structured *by* language. Or, to put it another way: language provides the "structure and limit" (p. 56) of the field in which the subject comes-to-be, and this means above all the psychoanalytic subject.

THE ECSTATIC SELF

But what is this subject, after all, this being who is defined by language and who becomes Other to himself by being *in* language? "What constitutes me as subject is my question," remarks Lacan (*Écrits*, p. 86), echoing Heidegger's description of *Dasein* as a questioning being in the introduction to *Being and Time*. Questioning—whether of oneself, of other beings, or of Being itself—is itself a fundamental form of splitting within the subject, since it inexorably introduces a division between the questioner and the questioned, the known and the unknown. Lacan therefore speaks of the subject as "ex-centric," as alienated from himself. The philosophical origins of this conception of the subject again derive from Heidegger's analysis of subjectivity in *Being and Time*. In this work of 1927, Heidegger designates human existence as "*Dasein*": literally, being-there. To be-there is to ex-ist, to stand-out in one's being-in-the-world. Such ex-isting is a way in which *to-be*:

The 'essence' of this entity [*Dasein*] lies in its 'to be' [*Zu-sein*: about to be, implying possibility]. . . . *The essence of Dasein lies in its existence*. . . . In each case *Dasein* is its possibility. [*Being and Time*, pp. 67–68; Heidegger's italics]

Dasein exists, then, by standing out—out from the world regarded as a collection of indifferent, present-at-hand particulars and out from itself as a centered substrate. As thus ex-centric and

ex-static, *Dasein* stands out as being something other than its mundanity or egocentricity would prescribe or predict; and it does so in two basic ways: (1) *Dasein* ex-ists by the *projection of existentially significant possibilities* through its understanding of the world and itself: an understanding that is essentially projective by virtue of its fore-structure, through which it is ineluctably drawn into the hermeneutical circle of knowing projectively what it comes to know in detail in cognitive (and other forms) of inquiry; and (2) *Dasein* also stands out from itself by its *involvement with others* in the "with-world" of human sociality, especially in the crucial activity of "leaping ahead" in relation to others rather than "leaping in" for them by directly disburdening them of their anxiety or cares—where "leaping ahead" has remarkable affinities with psychoanalytic techniques of abstinence, silence, and empathic understanding. Such leaping ahead contrasts with the deadened and deadening passivity of *das Man* understood as the "they-self" which dictates conformity and submission.

TEMPORALITY

Basic to all these ex-centricities and making them possible is the temporality of the self. If the human subject could not distance itself from itself in time, it would live an unsplintered life of immediacy, of continuous bodily need and its gratification (whether actual or hallucinated). For the advent of demand and desire, there must be a power of projecting satisfactions in time—whether through memory or through anticipation of a wished-for object. Either way, whether I project toward a past or a future horizon, temporality exhibits itself in its radically differentiating role: as allowing me to differ from my present self, to be other than myself, to be self-alien in time.

Heidegger therefore defines temporality as "the primordial 'outside-of-itself' in and for itself" (*Being and Time*, p. 377). By this designation, he means to emphasize that the human experience of time cannot be confined to a succession of nows, arranged primly on some time-line. The series of now-points to which we are so often tempted to reduce temporal experience results from quantifying and shrinking a temporality that in and by itself is profoundly nonlinear. Such temporality, which belongs to *Dasein*

precisely as ex-istent or standing outside its own self-enclosed ego, is termed "ecstatico-horizontal" by Heidegger. Each of the three main forms of temporality—past, present, and future—can be seen as an open horizon which we actively project out of our existential concerns and preoccupations. Each temporal horizon is *outside* the center or source of the projecting, whether as having-already-been, going-to-be, or making-present. As such, each is a possible mode of temporalization, of being-in-time ec-statically. But of the three modes, the future has priority: "The primary phenomenon of primordial and authentic temporality is the future" (p. 378). Why so? The reason is that in relation to the future, *Dasein* is outside itself, apart from itself, in the most radical way: its basic "to-be" character, as accomplished in the projection of possibilities, is realized most completely in relation to the future, which is indeterminately open and is the locus of one's being-toward-death. It is in and through such temporalization of its existence that *Dasein* is self-centrifugal: alienated from itself in the literal sense of being, in time, other than itself. This is not to be regretted, Heidegger thinks; indeed, it is the way in which we live out our human existence most authentically. Inauthenticity enters only when the diasporadic, spread-out and opened-up sense of temporality just described is closed down and confined to a mere sequence of nows—to sheer "within-time-ness" (*Innerzeitigkeit*), in contrast to the disjunctive, ecstatico-horizontal temporality of authentic *Dasein*.

What do such apparently arcane descriptions of human temporality have to do with psychoanalysis? Lacan finds that Heidegger's analysis applies directly to the practice of psychoanalysis because "time plays its role in analytic technique in several ways" (*Écrits*, p. 95). The most obvious temporal parameters of the analytic process are its duration as a whole and the length of each session.

Total duration. The length of analysis cannot be determined in advance. For the subject in treatment, the total time it will take "can only be anticipated . . . as indefinite" (*Écrits*, p. 95). Why is this? Lacan's immediate response is that the *temps pour comprendre*—the time required for understanding and bespeaking

oneself as subjectivity—is strictly unpredictable. Lacan's phrase "anticipated as indefinite" evokes the very terms Heidegger used to describe the decisive notion of authentic temporality as involving being-toward-death (*Sein-zum-Tode*). Although death is the ending of life, Heidegger explains, it is neither a goal to be sought nor a terminal point to be merely awaited; it is the kind of thing we are always tending *toward*, yet may be either kept concealed from us or authentically anticipated (see *Being and Time*, p. 303). But since my death cannot be determined precisely in advance, in its exact character or position in the future, it is something I can only anticipate in an open-ended way, as "indefinite."

If the analytic experience is indeed analogous to being-toward-death, then it would be a grievous technical error to try to fix its end in advance. Freud attempted to do this in the case of the Wolf Man and came to regret it. Here the end was held out as definite, as something to be awaited and expected. This made the point of termination too determinate and produced what Lacan calls a "mirage," a "spatializing projection" (*Écrits*, pp. 95–96), because it destroyed the element of nonfixed standing-out which is an indispensable feature of *Dasein*'s temporality. Since the subject of psychoanalysis is a genuinely temporal being, the analytic process must reflect this fact by becoming itself intrinsically indefinite in duration. It is in this sense, indeed, that psychoanalysis can be said to be "interminable," in Freud's term, which Lacan revealingly translates into French as "*indéfinie*." To understand psychoanalysis as terminable in a definite, end-positing way is to transform its diffuse temporality into an alienated spatiality, and thus to foster "the vertigo of the domination of space" (p. 28).

Length of session. One of the most controversial features of Lacan's own practice has been his alteration of the length of the psychoanalytic session. The duration of this session is fixed by tradition at fifty minutes. Lacan finds the strict and unquestioning adherence to this time span suspiciously obsessional,² and has

2. Lacan himself seemed to regard his shortened sessions as frankly experimental and perhaps a thing of the past: "I would not have much to say about [such a matter] if I had not been convinced that, in experimenting with what have been called my short sessions, at a stage in my experience that is now concluded" (*Écrits*, p. 100). It is also to be noted that Lacan experimented with *lengthening* sessions.

advocated the seemingly arbitrary practice of terminating the session at the discretion of the analyst, reportedly after as little as several minutes.

We make no attempt to attack or defend this practice but wish only to point to its roots in Heidegger's contrast between human time and clock time. Although certainly useful for many purposes, clock time does not begin to reflect adequately the temporality of *Dasein*, much less of the unconscious. According to Heidegger, the time of clocks is the result of leveling down primordial temporality to a measurable (and measuring) public time that is impersonal and impartial. Lacan remarks that the advent of clock time "is relatively recent, since it goes back precisely to Huyghens' clock—in other words, to 1659—and the *malaise* of modern man does not exactly indicate that this precision is in itself a liberating factor for him" (*Écrits*, p. 98).

Lacan warns that strict observation of the fifty-minute rule may prove more oppressive than liberating. One is oppressed by the fateful inevitability with which one measured moment succeeds another until the set interval is marked off on some indifferent clock face. Indifference, indeed, is the heart of the matter:

The indifference with which the cutting up of the 'timing' interrupts the moments of haste within the subject can be fatal to the conclusion towards which his discourse was being precipitated, or even fix a misunderstanding or misreading in it, if not furnish the pretext for a retaliatory ruse. [p. 99]

In order to make the inadequacy and oppressive indifference of the standard session tolerable, a patient may collude with clock time itself: submit to it, labor in it conscientiously, yet temporize all the while. This labor, observed most dramatically in obsessives, is "forced labor" whose motive lies in the awaited death of the analyst qua master (cf. *Écrits*, p. 26). But any such attitude toward death, whether it be one's own or another's, is manifestly inauthentic and deadens the analytic process itself through the patient's identification with the quasi-impendingly dead analyst. The patient lives "in the [expectation] of the master's death, from which moment he will begin to live, but in the meantime he identifies

himself with the master as dead, and as a result of this he is himself already dead" (p. 100). This result, adds Lacan, is one of the aspects of the master-slave dialectic which Hegel did *not* describe but which is powerfully operative in psychoanalytic practice.³

The Vicissitudes of the Influences

Investigation of Lacan's Hegelian roots led us to turn to Heidegger; reflection upon his debt to Heidegger has now led us back to Hegel. But the ingressions of these two influences in Lacan's thinking is not as conveniently complementary as this circle might suggest. A number of unresolved issues emerge from their convergence, and we shall pose these in order to set the stage for a discussion of how Lacan appropriates both influences in a psychoanalytic theory that is at once both deeply Freudian and strikingly original.

THE DISPLACEMENT OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The point at which the convergent influences of Hegel and Heidegger most obviously collide concerns the question of consciousness. There is no obvious way to harmonize their views on this subject, hence no way in which Lacan might integrate them in a higher synthesis. Although Hegel certainly does not conceive of consciousness as the consciousness of the Cartesian ego, he is nevertheless ineradicably committed to the concept of consciousness, or more exactly and significantly, to a dialectic which transforms all consciousness into *self-consciousness*. *The Phenomenology of Spirit* traces an evolution of forms of consciousness in which whatever consciousness takes to be an independent substance is shown to be only an object-for-consciousness and thereby appropriated by self-consciousness. Hegel even says that mind or spirit

3. "The slave has given way in face of the risk of death in which mastery was being offered to him in a struggle of pure prestige. But since he knows that he is mortal, he also knows that the master can die. From this moment on he is able to accept his labouring for the master and his renunciation of pleasure in the meantime; and, in the uncertainty of the moment when the master will die, he waits" (*Écrits*, p. 99).

is precisely this process of transforming "Substance into Subject, the object of *consciousness* into the object of *self-consciousness*. . . . The movement is the circle that returns into itself, the circle that presupposes its beginning and reaches it only at the end" (p. 488; Hegel's italics).

Heidegger, by contrast, deliberately rejects the language of consciousness in *Being and Time* because he believes that the entire "epoch" of post-Cartesian philosophy, including Hegel and Husserl, has been too self-centered on the metaphysics of the subject. Much as Lacan claims that psychoanalysis must move away from the narcissistic discourse of the empty word—from "the mirage of the monologue" (*Écrits*, p. 41), which is nevertheless its natural and necessary beginning point—so Heidegger demands that pure consciousness, the very foundation of the Cartesian *cogito* and of Husserl's phenomenological reduction, be transcended in the existential analytic of *Dasein*, whose structures of "being-in" (state-of-mind, understanding, discourse, and fallenness) do not include the least vestige of pure consciousness.

It is not surprising that Lacan should side with Heidegger in this dispute. Just as Freud had excoriated philosophers generally for conflating mind with consciousness, so Lacan takes Hegel to task for not allowing more adequately for the dispossession of consciousness, its displacement or "subversion" by the subject of desire:

Freud's discovery was to demonstrate that this verifying process [i.e., that the real is rational] authentically attains the subject only by decentering him from the consciousness-of-self, in the axis of which the Hegelian reconstruction of the phenomenology of mind maintained it. [*Écrits*, p. 80]

For Hegel, Lacan argues, "the subject knows what he wants" (p. 301) from the very outset. Since whatever is recognized by self-consciousness was already present to consciousness, the end is present from the beginning, and perfect self-consciousness is therefore "the fundamental hypothesis of this whole process. [It] is named, in effect, as being the substratum of this process: [it] is called the '*Selbstbewusstsein*', the being conscious of self, the fully

conscious self" (p. 296). But for Lacan the subject cannot know what he wants at the outset: his very existence consists in a systematic *méconnaissance*. The very process of psychoanalysis is one of coming to know one's desiring self from a state of initial symptomatic ignorance; it is a matter of the recognition of repressed desire, a recognition which requires the mediating role of the analyst as the foil from which the expression of one's own self-unknown desire returns in a reversed form that lays it bare (*Écrits*, p. 85). Another way of putting this is to stress the essential opacity of the "I" in contrast with the putative clarity of consciousness:

The promotion of consciousness as being essential to the subject in the historical after-effects of the Cartesian *cogito* is for me the deceptive accentuation of the transparency of the 'I' in action at the expense of the opacity of the signifier that determines the 'I'; and the sliding movement [*glissement*] by which the *Bewusstsein* serves to cover up the confusion of the *Selbst* eventually reveals, with all Hegel's own rigour, the reason for his error in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. [p. 307]

Hegel too naively assumed that the self finds complete and transparent expression in the language and culture it produces and can attain full satisfaction and freedom by recognizing itself therein. But Freud discovered that the conscious significance may only dissimulate the subject's real desire in order to satisfy the demands of a superego imposed upon the subject by the very acquisition of language and culture.

Here we cannot speak seriously of any strict complementarity between Hegel and Heidegger, for it is not a question of what would fill out consciousness to make some larger whole, but of that which undermines the self-confidence and self-certainty of consciousness itself. For Heidegger and Lacan, consciousness is self-extirpating, not self-exfoliating.

TOTALITY

The mention of "whole" brings us to another major confrontation between Lacan's primary philosophical progenitors. For Hegel, the truth lies in the whole—in the totality of the philosoph-

ical system which is attained in absolute knowledge. The truth of any given stage of development always lies in the necessarily more ample successor stage, and ultimately in the totality of stages. Heidegger recognizes no such cumulative dialectic; *Being and Time* presents us with a scattered set of *Dasein*'s existential structures. This results in such a disconcerting array of features that Heidegger is driven to draw them together under such englobing rubrics as "care" and temporality. But neither care nor temporality represents a higher level, or a more truthful phase, of fundamental ontology: in the text they function mainly as modes of encirclement and repetition. No progressive or even strictly successive movement is realized in the pages of *Being and Time*, much less in Heidegger's later writings.

Once again, Heidegger and Lacan are natural colleagues compared with Hegel; but this time Lacan goes still further in his dissociation from the latter. What is most primordial and most valued is not systematic totality but dispersal or discontinuity itself—in a word, *difference* rather than *identity*. Lacan's phrases for such ur-difference include references to the subject's "original splitting," to his "radical heteronomy," to his status as a "discontinuity in the real" (*Écrits*, pp. 28, 172, 299). The critical factor in the determination of the subject in psychoanalysis always occurs in the form of a disconnection or "cut" (*coupure*) in the conscious chain of signifiers:

Discontinuity, then, is the essential form in which the unconscious first appears to us as a phenomenon—discontinuity, in which something is manifested as a vacillation. Now, if this discontinuity has this absolute, inaugural character in the development of Freud's discovery, must we place it—as was later the tendency with analysts—against the background of a totality?

Is the *one* anterior to discontinuity? I do not think so, and everything I have taught in recent years has tended to exclude this need for a closed *one*. . . . You will grant me that the *one* that is introduced by the experience of the unconscious is the *one* of split, of the stroke, of rupture. [*Four Concepts*, pp. 25–26]

The bar of repression is a strictly unsurpassable barricade which splits the subject (\$) just as the bar (—) splits the sign into signifier and signified (\underline{S}).

What is the subject thus split *into*? Not into id, ego, and super-ego, as on Freud's structural model. Instead, the split finds its paradigm in Heidegger's distinction between the "ontic" and the "ontological," between particular beings and Being. Heidegger claims that our preoccupation with particular beings covers up and conceals the question of the meaning of Being. Similarly, Lacan distinguishes between the Other and others. The Other is the unconscious regarded as "the pure subject of the signifier" (*Écrits*, p. 305), whereas others are the counterparts of the ego: any object, including other persons qua objects, with which the subject may affiliate in a real, imaginary, or symbolic mode. The difference between Other and other is constituted by the bar of repression, much as attention to particular beings veils the meaning of Being, according to Heidegger. In Heidegger's later writings, "difference" and "rift" emerge as still more central than in *Being and Time*, and these concepts have influenced not only Lacan, but Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze, and Derrida. Common to all these thinkers is an emphasis on differentiation at the expense of totalization, which distinguishes them sharply from Hegel, whose entire system is epitomized in the idea that "the truth is the whole."

DEATH

Yet Heidegger himself recognized quite clearly that his emphasis upon the existential and ec-static raises serious problems about *Dasein*'s totalization. The second division of *Being and Time*, the analysis of temporality, begins with a section entitled "The Seeming Impossibility of Getting *Dasein*'s Being-a-Whole into our Grasp Ontologically and Determining its Character." Here we read that "as long as *Dasein* is as an entity, it has never reached its 'wholeness.' But if it gains such 'wholeness,' this gain becomes the utter loss of Being-in-the World" (p. 280). It is in answer to this paradox, indeed, that Heidegger embarks upon his analysis of being-toward-death as the only way in which *Dasein*'s being-a-whole is realizable. Nevertheless, one cannot achieve totality in

death, since by dying one ceases to exist. Being-a-whole is therefore "realizable" only as something continually receding, not as an end-state or as a completion "still outstanding" which we could expect or await. Still, being-toward-death is the most complete and most authentic way in which one can be ahead-of-oneself. But what one is ahead *for* or *about* is not the event of dying—which is mere "perishing"—but something which is inherently indefinite, as we have seen. It is a matter of the "possible impossibility" of one's existence, and one is almost perversely advised to be resolute about that which, by its very nature, can never be definitively resolved. If Hegel allows spirit to achieve its end in absolute knowledge, *Dasein* is consigned to being toward an end which it cannot attain without ceasing to exist and losing its "to-be" character. Being-toward-death is thus a strangely nonfinal form of finalism, a nontelic teleology.

Contrast with this suspended state the situation at the end of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. In this finale, finalism is genuinely finalistic. There is nothing more to be anticipated, since the end is all encompassing. Each prior stage of the dialectic of self-consciousness has been taken up into the next in such a way that nothing has been wholly lost. Hence spirit can be said to survive the demise of each of its preceding avatars and to reach a decisive culmination in absolute knowledge.

This epitomizes Hegel's own account of the acceptance of death. Whereas natural life reaches its limit and end in death, human existence transcends nature in taking the negativity of death into itself and transmuting it into "the labor of the negative." In human culture and history, the fact and fear of death are subordinated to the cumulative development of mind or spirit, which is self-limiting and self-transcending. Death is "of all things the most dreadful," Hegel writes:

But the life of spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. . . . Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magic power

that converts it into being. This power is identical with what we earlier called the subject. [p. 19]

Thus, although Hegel argues that "it is only through staking one's life that freedom is won" (p. 114), freedom cannot be realized if one's life is actually lost, but only through the ongoing labors of the slave and his or her several historical permutations. Spirit "finds its truth" when it re-collects itself from this utter dismemberment in an absolute knowledge which is the appropriation of its own history and in which time itself is overcome and annulled. Such a result would be unthinkable in *Being and Time*, whose last sentence makes time the unsurpassable "horizon of Being" (p. 488).

The most important disparity between Hegel's and Heidegger's views on death, however, emerges from attempting to answer the question, *Whose* death is at stake here? For Heidegger, death is "my ownmost possibility" (p. 303). Since no one else can accomplish it for me, this possibility is preeminently my own and consequently "nonrelational" (p. 303). The authentic anticipation of death therefore "individualizes *Dasein* down to itself" (p. 308), summoning me out of everyday preoccupations and the anonymity of *das Man*. Being-toward-death is therefore the ultimate expression of the "mineness" (*Jemeinigkeit*) which is as primordial a characteristic of *Dasein* as existence itself (cf. p. 67). In psychoanalytic nomenclature, it is a matter of something strictly intrapsychic, of something one must come to know in one's essential aloneness.

For Hegel, by contrast, the acceptance of death is achieved through relation to another self—in the struggle for recognition—and the possibility of death becomes entangled in the interpersonal dialectic of the master-slave relation. Wherever the theme of death recurs in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, it proves an occasion for a movement beyond the solitude of the mortal person toward community, toward recognizing that the truth of spirit is not "I," but "We."⁴ In regard to this fundamental issue, Lacan

4. "Spirit is . . . this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which in their opposition enjoy perfect freedom and independence; 'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I'" (*The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 110).

sides with Hegel. The psychoanalytic situation is a scene of interlocution and is thus radically interpersonal and never reducible to two separate selves encountering each other. The we-ness of transference, for example, is confirmed by the fact of countertransference and by the dialectic engendered by the two transference events. In contrast with the authentic individual's resolute but lonely anticipation of death, Lacan urges that the dialectic whereby the subject "brings his solitude to realization, be it in the vital ambiguity of immediate desire or in the full assumption of his being-for-death," is "not individual" (*Écrits*, p. 105). However solitary the individual's mortal end, the end of psychoanalysis is a "We," not an "I": "The question of the termination of analysis is that of the moment when the satisfaction of the subject finds a way to realize itself in the satisfaction of everyone—that is to say, of all those whom this satisfaction associates with itself in a human undertaking" (p. 105).

But if Lacan here agrees with Hegel that the goal is a personal truth or satisfaction that is at the same time intersubjective, he is not thereby tempted to endorse Hegel's claim that the truth lies in the whole and is to be achieved in an absolute knowledge which comprehends all particular truths within itself. Psychoanalysis can promise no such consummate truth. The Hegelian insistence upon the intersubjective must be tempered by the Heideggerian denial of totality. In the absence of the absolute knowledge of Hegel's self-knowing and self-known spirit, there is only the unending, indefinite search for a certainty which will never be attained as such. This is why psychoanalysis must find a third way between, or beyond, Hegel and Heidegger:

Of all the undertakings that have been proposed in this century, that of the psychoanalyst is perhaps the loftiest, because the undertaking of the psychoanalyst acts in our time as a mediator between the man of care and the subject of absolute knowledge. [*Écrits*, p. 105]

LACAN
freud

In what way does psychoanalysis deserve this lofty office? What is lacking in these two great philosophical visions of truth, of self-

discovery, and of reconciliation that can only be achieved through psychoanalysis? In the end Lacan dismisses both Hegelian and Heideggerian resolutions as impossible or inadequate. Why?

The answer lies in Freud's "Copernican step" (*Écrits*, p. 295), in the discovery of a dimension of the mind which transforms the human condition into a riddle: the unconscious. This is what is missing from both philosophical resolutions, and what foredooms any strictly philosophical quest for self-knowledge. Only psychoanalysis can make up for this lack, because only psychoanalysis offers a hermeneutics of the unconscious.

But the unconscious is not merely a cryptogram to be deciphered, whose interpretation would yield that absolute knowledge which Hegel promoted or the overcoming of alienation which Heidegger portrayed as the task of authentic existence. The unconscious is not simply an unknown realm to be incorporated into a more complete version of absolute knowledge, nor a level of man's being to be uncovered by a more fundamental ontology. The problem reaches much deeper. The existence of the unconscious means that the splitting of the subject, which begins with the infant's discovery of his image in the mirror, is as insurmountable for Lacan as it is for Sartre. The unity of the self in philosophical self-reflection is only a permutation of the reflected unity that stems from the situation wherein the infant, still subjectively disjointed, espies in the mirror a specular self having an imaginary unity, but wherein the subject of desire does not appear. This is because a desire is a *lack*, a want-to-be which cannot appear in an image; it can only refer to what is missing, to the object wanted, or, in this instance, to the very unity and coordination which are still lacking in the infant (see *Écrits*, p. 315). Nor do the mere maturation of the cortex and the development of motor skills guarantee integral *psychic* wholeness through natural organic development. The discrepancy between a disparate, incomplete subject and its imaged unity only anticipates a more profound splitting of the subject due to "the agency of the letter," to the subject's entrance into the symbolic order. This subjection of the subject to the effects of the signifier only replaces the image of the body in the mirror with the "I," a shifty word whose unity is

all the more deceptive in that it is only a "shifter" which does not signify the self at all, but only designates whoever is speaking (*Écrits*, p. 298), and is therefore as indifferent to individuality as Heidegger's anonymous "one." Pursued further, this symbolic path will lead to the ego ideal, which does not represent the true subject, but only captivates him once more.

But to say that what is not present in these imaginary or symbolic representations is the self-as-desiring does not mean that what is lacking is the economics of the libido understood as the biological energetics of organic instinct. All this has only to do with *need*, which is prehuman. The effects of the signifier "proceed from a deviation of man's needs from the fact that he speaks, in the sense that insofar as his needs are subjected to demand, they return to him alienated" (*Écrits*, p. 286). The task of psychoanalysis is not to discover Rousseau's natural man beneath the brittle shell of a culture which imprisons him. Even if that were possible, analysis would not thereby liberate anything like a "noble savage," but the savagely patricidal brothers of Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. In any case, such a retrogression is not possible, because the natural man, uninfected by culture, is not a man at all, is not yet human, according to Lacan. And when it comes to man, purely organic need or natural instinct is as much a myth in Freud's eyes as was the natural man by Rousseau's own admission. "Instincts," says Freud, "are mythical entities, magnificent in their indefiniteness" (1933, p. 95). Moreover, as Hegel argued, the natural man's desire is not human desire because it is solipsistic, aimed only at consuming the object or using the other for his own solitary gratification (albeit a certain cunning of nature may in turn use his private pleasure to perpetuate the species).

But haven't we now returned to the beginning of this entire discussion, where we argued that Lacan simply adopts Hegel's analysis of desire instead of Freud's "energy discourse"? We have indeed insofar as Lacan persistently asserts that man's desire is the desire to be desired, thereby adhering to Hegel's analysis of desire. In fact, it is not Lacan but *Hegel* who departs from this very analysis. He does so not by abandoning his own view, but by sublating or transcending desire itself. For Hegel, desire is only

the most immediate form of self-consciousness. Whether as hunger, thirst, or lust, it is self-feeling, a form of self-awareness we share with other animals. It becomes truly human only as the desire to be desired, when need becomes subjected to demand. But in either case it is only the most primitive form of self-consciousness, and is transcended through labor and history. Desire is not therein abandoned, but *aufgehoben*, surpassed and preserved. Thus desire is sublimated, taken up into history, which Hegel insists is only motivated by passion and self-interest (albeit a certain cunning of reason may transform private ambition into a means of realizing human truth). Following Kojève's metaphor, we could say that all of history is a permutation of the labor of the slave, who subordinates his own desire to that of the master, sacrificing human desire and pleasure to the fear of death, but finally finding satisfaction by recognizing himself in the objects produced by his labor—just as Hegel claimed to find absolute knowledge by recognizing world history as the progressive realization of that same absolute knowledge.

But for Lacan this is all *méconnaissance*, like identifying with one's own image in the mirror, since the subject can never be found adequately reflected in any object. There is no redemption or reconciliation to be had through history because the subject of desire can never be absorbed or *aufgehoben* in history, but only subverted or repressed there. In Lacanian language, Hegel attempted to absorb desire into demand, which is established by the *Logos*, in the realm of language, wholly mediated by symbolism and governed by the law of the signifier. Lacan agrees with Ricoeur to the extent that he holds that desire can never be entirely translated into demand, or strictly identified with the linguistic order. But at the same time, as we have just seen, he insists that desire can never be reduced to the merely natural, to biological need. Hence, in response to criticism of the Hegelian themes in his work, Lacan asserts that "far from ceding to a logicizing reduction where it is a question of desire, I find its irreducibility to demand the very source of that which also prevents it from being reduced to need" (*Écrits*, p. 302). What can this mean?

It means that the unconscious is not the hiding place of the

natural man, and, further, is not to be confused with the cultural unconscious, wherein are stored such historical treasures as our unexamined beliefs, our tacit values, and the laws of our native language. It is no more a subterranean reservoir of volcanic emotional energy than it is the cerebral storehouse of the rules of a Chomskian transformational grammar. Lacan defines desire straightforwardly as that which rises out of the discrepancy between need and demand: "Thus desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference which arises from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting (*Spaltung*)" (*Écrits*, p. 287).

It is just here that we reach the origin of the dialectic of desire. Desire belongs *neither* to the natural *nor* to the symbolic order. It is situated at the intersection of the natural and the signifying, but neither the natural nor the signifying is left uninfected by the encounter. Desire arises at this intersection like a *herm*, that phallic post which the ancient Greeks erected at crossroads and dedicated to Hermes, the messenger of the gods and hence the patron of hermeneutics, the art or science of interpreting symbolism. We have already noted Lacan's insistence that the phallus is not an organ but a signifier, and this Hermetic function reminds us that the mysteries marked at this crossroads are not simply those of the barnyard or the birds and the bees, that the messenger of the gods is also present there. For the phallus points toward a *jouissance*, a fullness of being that is not to be attained through purely organic pleasures alone. Such pleasures, Lacan affirms, are transient satisfactions that may fulfill a need or answer the demand for proofs of love; but desire moves beyond the pleasure principle:

Pleasure limits the scope of human possibility—the pleasure principle is a principle of homeostasis. Desire, on the other hand, finds its boundary, its strict relation, its limit, and it is in the relation to this limit that it is sustained as such, crossing the threshold imposed by the pleasure principle. [*Four Concepts*, p. 31]

This "strict relation" of desire to its limit refers to the internal bond between desire and the Law, which refers in the first instance to the injunction against incest operative in the oedipal situation. But Lacan finds in this very situation a set of relations which go beyond the specific prohibition against incest, something "indestructible" (*Four Concepts*, p. 31) escaping both temporality and historicity. These relations comprise a *structure* (see *Écrits*, p. 105) which transcends "culturalism"—and thus undercuts the dialectic of spirit—just because it represents the encounter between a needful organism and culture. For any culture inevitably imposes its own unnatural order, that of the signifier, upon the bodily subject. The incest taboo is only the nexus at which these two dimensions of human existence, the natural and the signifying, most conspicuously intersect.

Lévi-Strauss has assiduously demonstrated the same dialectic of nature and culture everywhere—at the intersection of the raw and the cooked, in the origin of table manners, and so forth. But Lacan scarcely needed the help of other French structuralists to discover this generalization of the oedipal conflict, since Freud had already made it the topic of an arresting analysis in *Civilization and its Discontents*. Lacan urges that the father in the oedipal triangle is not the actual father, but must be understood as a signifier, as "the Name of the Father." As such, he is not the one who provides for biological needs nor the one who might respond to the demand for love. It is the *dead* Father who "constitutes the law of the signifier" (*Écrits*, p. 217; cf. also pp. 199, 310). It is here that death insinuates itself into the Lacanian concept of desire in a veritable *Liebestod*. No longer a matter of an imminent being-toward-death to be authentically anticipated nor of an absolute master to be overcome by history, death enters as a condition of language:

So when we wish to attain in the subject what was before the serial articulations of speech, and what is primordial to the birth of symbols, we find it in death, from which his existence takes on all the meaning it has. It is in effect as a

desire for death that he affirms himself for others . . . and no being is ever evoked by him except among the shadows of death. [*Écrits*, p. 105]

The birth of symbols spells the death of things, since to begin to deal with the world symbolically is to enter into a world of meanings which mediate all human consciousness. The thing is thereby relegated to the status of that-which-is signified, as all direct awareness of things falls under the shadow of the signifier. Initiation into the Hermetic mysteries of the word therefore means "dying to the world" in a truly Socratic manner: "Thus the symbol manifests itself first of all as the murder of the thing, and this death constitutes in the subject the eternalization of his desire" (p. 104).

The subject's desire is both eternalized and subverted by the Father's signifying strictures, his prohibiting Law—the law of the signifier—with the result that the desiring subject is constituted as a subverted subject. Lacan calls such superimposing of the cultural upon the natural "primal repression" (in Freud's term) and holds it to be the very origin of the unconscious. But Lacan adds that it is also the origin of desire:

That which is alienated in needs constitutes an *Urverdrängung* (primal repression), an inability, it is supposed, to be articulated in demand, but it reappears in something it gives rise to that presents itself in man as desire (*das Begehr*). [*Écrits*, p. 286]

Hence the law of the signifier sets up a bar dividing the subject, and is both constitutive and subversive of desire. It also bars the way to *jouissance*, that primordial union with the Mother whose recovery is prohibited by the paternal "No" and which signifies that completion of being which is forever inaccessible to the split subject. In this way, the relation of desire to its limit, upon which Lacan places so much emphasis, expresses an inescapable antinomy that is the final source of the dialectic of desire:

But we must insist that *jouissance* is forbidden to him who speaks as such, although it can only be said between the lines

for whoever is subject of the Law, since the Law is grounded in this very prohibition [*Écrits*, p. 319]

It is for this reason that the phallus, the *herm* erected at the intersection of the natural and the signifying, comes to be conceived as the supreme signifier, the signifier of signifiers: "the privileged signifier of that mark in which the role of the logos is joined with the advent of desire" (*Écrits*, p. 287). For the phallus is

itself a sign of the latency with which any signifiable is struck, when it is raised (*aufgehoben*) to the function of signifier. The phallus is the signifier of this *Aufhebung* itself, which it inaugurates (initiates) by its very disappearance. That is why the demon of *Aidos* (*Scham*, shame) arises at the very moment when, in the ancient mysteries, the phallus is unveiled. [p. 288]

Or rather we should say that the phallus is the signifier of the bar that separates the signifier from the signified in Saussure's formula for signification $\text{S} \frac{\text{signifier}}{\text{signified}}$, which Lacan recasts as $\frac{\text{S}}{\text{s}}$ to emphasize the dominance of the signifier. There is no trespassing of this *barre*, which is ultimately that of *Urverdrängung*. The way is barred, even if the bar can be said to withdraw once it is revealed. The phallus signifies this bar in its simultaneously repressing and revealing role: "it then becomes the bar which, at the hands of this demon, strikes the signified, marking it as the bastard offspring of this signifying concatenation" (p. 288). Herein lies the origin of the split subject, barred from the urgent finalism of the desiring self.

To invoke the phallus is also, and necessarily, to raise the question of castration. Castration, or more exactly its threat, is the final undercutting of finality. It arises, first of all, in the undermining of oedipal triumph; but it remains potently present in the sequel to this first splitting of the subject from his or her own desire. For this sequel involves the establishment *from within* of the very same limit, Law, or Name of the Father which is the dyadic Other of desire. All of these belong under the heading of the phallus and together give "the ratio of desire" (*Écrits*, p. 288). But it is castration which *enforces* this ratio by barring *jouissance*:

What analytic experience shows is that, in any case, it is castration that governs desire, whether in the normal or the abnormal. . . .

Castration means that *jouissance* must be refused, so that it can be reached on the inverted ladder of the Law of desire. [Écrits, pp. 323–24]

The dialectic of desire shows it to be the desire of the Other; which means that it is marked indelibly by the play of the signifier, the intervention of language. This signifying play is dialectical to start with by virtue of its intersubjective source in the oedipal conflict; it becomes a matter of internal dialectic when the dissolution of this conflict leads to the installation of the Law within. But, as we have seen earlier, it can become interpersonal again in and through the process of analysis, when the desire of my Other rejoins the desire of other Others as mediated by the analyst, who is Other to myself. In the end, then, the dialectic of desire is intersubjective, and Hegel is supported against Heidegger. Heidegger is in turn borne out, however, in his conception of the subject as subordinate to language, as a bespoken subject who is in the end more the creature than the creator of language. What Lacan hastens to add, though, is that being bespoken is being broken—broken apart by the signifiers whose proper locus is to be found in the Other. The “eclipse of the subject” is in fact “closely bound up with the *Spaltung* or splitting that [the subject] suffers from its subordination to the signifier” (Écrits, p. 313).

But this splitting of the speaking subject is itself a reflection of “the division immanent in desire” (p. 289), a division which takes us back finally to Freud, the repressed influence in this essay. For it is Freud who proposed the leading hypotheses of primal repression and the castration complex, both of which are ultimately responsible for desire’s diremption and hence for the splitting of the subject understood psychoanalytically. If the bar between “S” and “s” is raised in partial revelation by the Hermetic phallus, it is reimposed in a decidedly downward direction by that *Urverdrängung* and threat of castration which keep death at the doorstep of desire, Thanatos at the threshold of Eros. And the subject? His

being is split irremediably between demand and need, with desire as the quotient of their difference.

Freud, the long-since-dead father of psychoanalysis, had already reached the reluctant conclusion that civilization and discontent are inseparable, that the subjection of man to culture foredooms him to what Hegel called “the unhappy consciousness,” the “consciousness of self as a dual-natured, merely contradictory being” (p. 126). Lacan reinforces Freud’s grim conclusion that the contradiction is insuperable, that history can promise no final reconciliation, no splendid synthesis, not even an arena for the attainment of authenticity: cuttings and splittings, human lives in tatters, are all that remain in this darkened vision.

But Lacan’s own contribution is not to be subverted by the vicissitudes of his powerful influences. His claim to be the only orthodox interpreter of Freud in an age of heresy ironically disguises the originality which his conception of the dialectic of desire introduces into psychoanalytic theory. Nevertheless, his position is profoundly Freudian, and any assessment of Lacan’s significance must acknowledge the Name of the Father of psychoanalysis as the repressed signifier which returns as only the repressed can return: inscribed symbolically and symptomatically, written over and overwritten, in that uniquely vexing set of signifiers whose name is Écrits.

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