

The Subject On Which Psychoanalysis Operates Is None Other Than The Subject Of Science

by Juan Pablo Lucchelli

Let us start from this statement by Jacques Lacan, which is in principle very paradoxical, as he, himself, admits: 'the subject on which psychoanalysis operates is none other than the subject of science'(1). The text "Science and Truth" was published in *Cahiers pour l'analyse* in January 1966. The paradoxical statement that we are concerned with here is that psychoanalysis and science at the very least oppose each other precisely on the status granted to the subject. Is it not Lacan who affirmed that science is an ideology of foreclosure? How then can we understand Lacan's assertion that the subject of science and the subject of psychoanalysis are identical, or at least overlapping?

In *L'oeuvre Claire* (1994) Jean-Claude Milner expands on Lacan's formula: the subject on which psychoanalysis operates, he says, is none other than the subject of science. He also says that this sentence presupposes three implicit assertions: 1) that psychoanalysis operates on a subject (and not, for example, on a "self"); 2) that there is a subject of science; 3) that these two subjects are one and the same. And as Lacan also points out, the subject differs from "any form of empirical individuality "(2).

The idea of a subject of science, Milner tells us, is not itself a Lacanian idea. But if Lacan never expressly talked about it, the idea can be found in Koyré who stipulates that modern science begins with Galileo. Koyre explores this cut (the word 'cut' is also not found in the work of the epistemologist) between the ancient episteme and modern science. This, according to Milner, is how the Galilean break could produce effects in different discursive fields: material economics (Althusser's hypothesis), literature (Barthes), political philosophy (Leo Strauss, Carl Schmitt), the images (Panofsky), the speculative philosophy (Heidegger). Each articulates the effect this cut between the ancient episteme and modern science has in their respective fields.

In his commentary on Plato's Menon, Lacan follows Koyré who points out that even if the slave is capable of reminiscence, he or she can only reach new knowledge (of something that he or she doesn't already know) "by making a mistake"(3). Faced with the mathematical problem presented by Socrates, the Slave begins to answer by making an error: that is, he begins by making a mistake drawn from common sense, the common stock of beliefs that is accessible to everyone. Common sense is guided by appearances. Plato's common sense, then, would be what is common knowledge to everyone with a certain ability to reason from perception: the poets, thesophists, rhetoricians, orators, etc. In other words, anyone who doesn't speak philosophical language. For Plato, perception is not intelligence (*dianoia*). The epistemic represents the already constituted knowledge, science, but also any profession. Only the philosopher seeks intelligence (*dianoia*). That is why, in the Menon, Socrates insists on the famous distinction between the reality of a thing and the reality of a quality. It is on this point that Menon formulates this paradox that Socrates takes seriously: how can we be looking for something when we have no idea what it is? We can't try to find out what we don't know from what we know (since it would be sterile) because even if we did find it, we wouldn't know what it is that we have found (what we have been looking for). Reminiscence theory is one answer to this problem.

Now we can unveil the meaning of our title. Lacan's equation, concerning the identity between the subject of science and the subject of psychoanalysis, owes more to Max Weber than to Descartes. In 1917, three years before his death, Weber gave a lecture at a German university entitled "Wissenschaft als Beruf" which is translated as "Science as a Science". The central idea of this conference was that: "scientific work is a vocation"(4) that is in solidarity with the notion of progress(5). Let us hasten to distinguish between scientific *progress* (*written in italics* in the original) from any idea of progress seen as part of a set of values. For example, the work of art, says Weber, does not age. On the contrary, it gains value over time. While in modern science a just barely finished work will be replaced by something new. Weber goes on to ask what is the law that subjects and subordinates the

meaning of any work created in this scientific civilization? What interests us is that Weber thinks not only about science but also to "other elements of civilization".

Let us include psychoanalysis as one of these 'other elements of civilization' subject to these laws. Here, Weber would concur with Koyré *avant lettre* when he says that every scientific work is intended to grow old and be replaced by another. As soon as a theory is published, it is already old, it no longer belongs to the field of science as a *plus-de-savoir* (*Le Juif de savoir*, Milner, 2002). This *plus-de-savoir* is in some ways an antinomic sort of scientific knowledge since, speaking a very Koyrean discourse: "In principle, this progress goes on forever." For Weber, then, the subject of science is a mechanism through which all knowledge is insufficient because as soon as the scientist knows something, he's no longer part of the "know-it-all". He can only be a "fragment" (the word is Weber's).

It doesn't take a great deal of imagination to figure out the link between this view of modern science and the Lacanian commentary on the discontinuous, punctual, and evanescent character of the Cartesian "cogito"¹.

But, returning to Weber, it goes without saying that the subject of modern science (that we deduce from his lecture) ought not to be confused with the individual, the scientist himself. Rather, the subject of modern science corresponds to the circuit described above where progress in knowledge is propelled by a lack of knowledge, a thrust that we can identify with Milner's notion of more knowledge (*plus-de-savoir*). As soon as one knows, that knowledge is excluded from the circuit.

We can see that psychoanalysis obeys the same law as science in its requirement of always bringing something "new" and, as Freud said, to consider each session as being the first one. We have here the structure of the *plus-de-savoir*. Even what is repetitive, should be new. Even memory will have to be differentiated from everything that psychology would put under the rubric of "memory".

1 Lacan, J., *Ecrits*, Paris, Seuil, p. 858

2 Milner, J.-C., *L'oeuvre Claire*, Paris, Seuil, 1994, p. 34.

¹ In the seminar *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan takes the essential traits that Gueroult had already attributed to the cogito, let's say in the first fifty pages of his book devoted to Descartes.

- 3 Lacan, J., Le séminaire, livre II, Le moi dans la théorie de Freud, Paris, Seuil, 1978, p. 27.
- 4 Nous suivons ici Milner, Le juif de savoir, Paris, Grasset, 2002, p. 60 et suivantes.
- 5 Weber, M., Le savant et le politique, 10/18, 1963, p. 87