

From a seminar on the first four chapters of Civilisation and its Discontents

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1. The beautiful and the sublime

In Chapter I, in a letter to Freud, Romain Rolland expresses his experience of what he calls an oceanic feeling as one of eternity and limitlessness and claims that it is the source of religious feeling.

In opening his Civilisation and its Discontents on an aesthetic judgement which has the earmarks of the sublime and in remarking briefly in Chapter II on the judgement which elevates an object to the status of the beautiful, it seems to me that Freud is inviting the reader to explore these notions further especially since he considers them as operations in psychic structure.

2. The oceanic feeling

For my taste Romain Rolland's oceanic feeling is not an especially impressive illustration of the sublime. He orients it on the source of religious feeling. In other words, it falls into the field of the Other of guarantee which always incarnates the Father of protection. It structures the sublime as noble or as splendid, two of the three effects of the sublime in critical philosophy. The third effect is terrifying. The terrifying sublime does not seem to have the same structure in that it excludes the Other of guarantee and the Father of protection.

The oceanic feeling does conform to a category of the sublime called mathematical, being immeasurably great. Whether Romain Rolland imbues it with the power of nature which is the category of the dynamical sublime is not clear, cannot be decided from Freud's comment on his letter.

Freud traces the origin of the oceanic feeling to a sublime which is terrifying and asserts that it is transformed into a splendid or noble sublime when a longing for the Father of protection affects the structure. Or, as we say, the splendid and noble sublime are effects of the paternal metaphor.

The judgement of the sublime in critical philosophy is based on a disaccord between the imagination and reason. Confronting the sublime with imagination and without reason outrages the imagination in presenting it with the infinite. The sublime object is limitless, formless and deformed, bringing pain to the subject in a confrontation with it. Imagine being a citizen of a city of Renaissance splendour and then exiled to a desolate wasteland. It becomes limitless and deformed, incarnating the Thing. Not being limited, it has no absence and cannot be dialectised by presence and absence. The sublime as terrifying falls into the category of the real.

Reason in critical philosophy is linked to a supersensible world for which the only definition I can give is that it is not the phenomenal world. The supersensible self is in charge of reason. When it intervenes in a confrontation with the sublime, it brings pleasure by freeing the imagination from the sublime object. A sensuous link is broken. The pleasure is of a higher form. This explanation falls out of this world, according to Freud.

Until reason intervenes, the imagination is connected to the object itself with an effect of the real. The subject can extract pleasure from pain which is the idea in Edmund Burke's notion of enjoyment in horror, or he can grasp the manifold of the sublime object for which reason must intervene. It leaves one to wonder whether this is the ethical position that cleared the way for the infinite cardinal.

Judging the sublime prepares the subject for the advent of the moral law. The subject in a confrontation with it is in a state of fear and helplessness. In actual fear no judgement can be made, says Kant. The subject must cross through fear, must face destruction unflinchingly and courageously. Fear is not without an object written *a* to give it its real status. According to Kant the subject must resist it morally which brings pleasure. The Thing makes the moral law appear. Romain Rolland orients the oceanic feeling on the source of religious feeling which is a sign of the advent of the moral law as contained in the Name-of-the-Father.

3. Jouissance and the sublime

In the passage, still in Chapter I, in which Freud is designing a topology of internal and external the subject begins in a state of fear and helplessness.

His thesis is that an infant at the breast does not yet distinguish his ego from the external world as the source of sensations and excitations. He doesn't say that the ego does not exist, but he also doesn't say that the external world does not exist for it. It is not a matter of the external world as such but the external world as a source of excitations. His construction is based on the excitations to which the body is susceptible.

This is a continuation of the theme which begins in The Project: the subject's own quantity called Q-eta is summing in the psi-system where the quantity called Q with which his external perceptions are loaded also arrives. The perception that Freud focuses on is called The Thing. In a Lacanian formulation component *a* of the *Nebenmensch* is the Other plus the Thing. In a confrontation with it the subject is in a state of fear and helplessness. The external world as a source is the Thing, but it could be internal since the Thing is linked to psi. The omega-system which covers the concept of ego does, in fact, give an indication of reality, but in this logic translates quantity into quality, that is, into an experience in the pleasure-pain series. The ego in a confrontation with the Thing experiences *Unlust* in the field of *Lust*.

In another formulation the external world is the source of the Other's *jouissance*. Freud's construction is based on a non-distinction at the level of *jouissance*. It creates an effect of something boundless, says Freud, and is the source of the oceanic feeling. The subject in an encounter with the Thing has not grasped its manifold. It is the sublime as terrifying.

As a topology it seems to be a matter of a continuity of *jouissance* which is immeasurably great and the subject cannot grasp its manifold creating a sublime effect.

Our present ego-feeling, says Freud, is a shrunken residue of something more boundless. The ego-feeling - to keep to the logic - is the experience of the ego in the pleasure-pain series on encountering a shrunken residue of *jouissance*. *Jouissance* is evacuated leaving a residue called object *a* which in the term

extimate persists with an effect of a continuity.

The next step in Freud's construction breaks this logic. He argues that the external world as such has to be established and distinguished from the internal space. This depends on the appearance and disappearance of the breast in which dialectic it becomes an external object. But, the breast is a source of *jouissance* and, according to the first argument is in a continuity. It cannot disappear. There is the hallucination which is a non-belief in absence. In the second argument in appearance and disappearance the breast becomes responsible for breaking the continuity and evacuating *jouissance*. A source of *jouissance* becomes responsible for evacuating *jouissance*. There is a contradiction in the second argument.

The special action of the mother is to incarnate the function of the Other of the signifier and to subtract the Thing. Through the signifier the Other contracts a bond with the world for the subject. "We cannot fall out of this world", Freud quotes. It is quoted as something given, as an axiom. There exists the external world with which the subject has a bond of the One. It is not a oneness with the universe which could conceivably create an oceanic effect. It is a social bond which is the obstacle to falling out of this world.

4. The paternal metaphor

Freud asks what claims the oceanic feeling has to be regarded as the source of religious feeling.

The latter is derived from a state of helplessness in an encounter with the sublime. The subject in a state of fear and helplessness is experiencing the sublime but not judging it. There is no judgement here but a longing for the Father and for his protection. The expected logical effect is a shrinkage of *jouissance*. Through the paternal metaphor the subject is separated from its *jouissance* but makes no judgement of the sublime in its mathematical, dynamic and terrifying modes.

Freud, in Chapter II, finds it painful that man should have imagined for himself such an enormously exalted father. It seems that Freud prefers that the subject makes a judgement of the sublime.

5. The beautiful

In man's quest for happiness Freud considers briefly, in Chapter II, the role of beauty. It offers no protection against suffering but compensates for a great deal. For Kant beauty has no sensuous link to the object, and for Freud beauty is derived from the attributes of the sexual object through an impulse inhibited in its aim; these attributes are the object's secondary sexual characteristics.

In critical philosophy beauty is not logically implicated in the object. It is the effect of a subjective judgement of taste, synthetic. If the judgement involves a desire for similar objects, a judgement on the agreeableness of the object has been made and not a judgement of taste in which the subject responds with disinterested pleasure. It has to qualify as universal, that is, be such that others can share it. Pleasure is of a higher form, being linked to the supersensible self which includes a will determined by the moral law.

This unfathomable connection to the supersensible elevates the beautiful object to the status of the morally good - which it doesn't do at all, of course. It elevates the

judgement to the status of the morally good.

The judgement of taste is based on a harmonious play between the imagination and the understanding in which the understanding leaves the imagination undetermined by a concept.

For Freud, the attribute “beautiful” is also not logically implicated in the object. It has to be added in a judgement. Given a fundamental object *a*, the subject appears as a lack in the field of the Other and in a judgement adds the attribute capital A to *a*. The result is the syllogism of love: A*a*. The subject in an operation of the understanding becomes a signifier which determines the imagination with a concept. The subject does not fall out of this world, and *a* becomes the subject’s reality which is useless for civilisation, according to Freud, but it offers some compensation for suffering. The addition of A to *a* is a judgement of taste involving a concept, and it defines Freudian idealisation. Kant’s judgement of taste is not metonymic whereas the judgement involved in the syllogism of love is metonymic evoking desire for similar objects, *x*, to which the attribute “beautiful” is added: A*x*. The Oedipal lover adds A to *a*, and the Oedipalised lover of beauty adds A to a metonymic object *x*.

In Lacan’s Seminar VII the subject’s good is discovered in the Other, and it is the morally good which is the Ideal-signifier that the subject becomes. In the syllogism of love the desire it evokes is the desire of the Other. In love of beauty desire is conjoined to love and regulated by the morally good. Freud says that love of beauty is an example of an impulse inhibited in its aim. Freud’s assertion has to be interpreted from the perspective of a desire regulated by the morally good in which love is conjoined to desire. In this sense one can call the addition of A to *x* a judgement of taste. Idealisation is a judgement of taste.

The aim of a drive is to extract satisfaction from an object. If the aim is inhibited, the extraction of pleasure stops, and *jouissance* affects the structure. It is not the aim that is inhibited but the impulse itself at source. In which case love of beauty is also based on a subtraction of *jouissance*. Otherwise, the subject passes to the sublime.

The judgement of taste in Freud’s doctrine excludes the genitals and attaches to the secondary sexual characteristics which define the Other sex. Love of beauty based on a desire regulated by the morally good gives the subject access to the Other sex.

In Kant’s judgement of taste beauty stops desire. It is based on love associated with duty with which a will determined by the moral law is included. In Kant’s judgement of taste the ideal of the angel is incarnated. (See, Jacques-Alain Miller, Revue de L’École, No 25). There is no regulated desire, and Kant is associated with Sade. The subject experiences the moral law in the field of beauty without desire. Here, the subject has no access to the Other sex. Love of beauty as a duty leaves desire aberrant elsewhere to fall under duty and not under love. An aberrant desire does not lead to the sublime since the moral law cannot reach it. The advent of the moral law occurs where the object is elevated to the dignity of the Thing, and the subject passes from beauty to the sublime. It has to be an object of desire, and the subject passes from the imaginary to the real, which is in this logic a sublimation. Where desire stops the risk is that the moral law in the form of a superego not contained in the Name-of-the-Father intervenes in the relation between love and duty.

6. The narcissistic structure of the ego

In the syllogism of love Aa beauty becomes an attribute of an imaginary object. The effect of it is certainty. There is nothing of which we are more certain than the feeling of our own ego, says Freud in Chapter I. The addition of A to a gives the ego a guarantee that it does not lack. He continues that the ego is marked off sharply towards the exterior and towards the interior shades into a continuity with the id. One can take this id from two Lacanian perspectives. The id speaks, and it is impossible for the id to speak. In the first instance, the id is a chain of signifiers about which something can be said. In order to say anything the subject becomes a signifier and signifies the ego:

$$S_1 - S_2$$

.....

$$\$ \quad a$$

(e)

When the id speaks, the subject of the unconscious is concealed in an ego. The subject becomes a signifier and is concealed in the beautiful. In the syllogism of love the ego acquires a guarantee from the Other. In so far as the immeasurably great of Romain Rolland's oceanic feeling is falling under the father of protection, it is not the Freudian sublime but the noble and splendid sublime of the Other of guarantee.

In the case where the id does not speak the ego is in a confrontation with a sublime effect. I would take this effect as the division of the subject by the object: $\$ \leftrightarrow a$.

In passing from the id where *ça parle* to an object which is impossible to say, one arrives at the fundamental fantasy.

There is, nonetheless, a state of the ego, says Freud in Chapter I, in which it is not sharply marked off towards the exterior: the state of being in love. In the syllogism of love, Aa , a want-to-be is registered since the subject appears in the field of the Other. The lover puts this lack up against the lack in the Other which separates him from his *jouissance*.

In Chapter I, in the state of being in love the pronouns "I" and "you" mingle. In other words, in an imaginary identification each subject represents the other in the same meaning: $a - a'$. There is no subjective position. If, in addition, the operator of the barred Other is not in play, then *jouissance* returns to the Other. In this state a thought is ascribed to the external world, says Freud. A , though, is ascribed to the little other since each represents the other by the same meaning. For instance, to take the classical illustration, a woman says she has just been to the pork butchers to a man whom she meets in the corridor. Being represented by the same meaning as the little other, she hears him say 'sow'. At the level of *jouissance* he is going to cut her up into little pieces.

Any imaginary identification has the effect of representation by the same meaning on which the paranoiac delusion is based. Narcissism has paranoiac effects, but for

a paranoiac structure *jouissance* must return to the Other.

7. The signifier of the phallus

In Chapter III Freud lists a few founding acts of civilisation, amongst these man's conquest of fire. His explanation has by now become a little banal which I take as a challenge to make it fresh again. This founding act is like psychoanalytical material which is, he says, always incomplete and not susceptible to clear interpretation. Freud's interpretation is clear. So, it must be a construction. Freud is constructing the signifier of desire from the desire of man in a founding act.

He starts with a fact: a man can extinguish a fire by urinating on it, and a woman cannot. Man began pissing on fire, which Freud takes as a phallic symbol, in a homosexual rivalry with each other, but sparing the fire is the founding act.

Pissing on fire is not the founding act. Men were pissing on it before the murder of the father when fire could not be taken as a phallic symbol. There was no signifier. The founding act *par excellence* was the murder of the father. Sparing fire was a corollary to that act.

One retells the Freudian story of man's conquest of fire always with a little humour that evokes an imaginary scene of a woman trying to piss on a fire. It is humour of a special kind which Freud calls *superego* humour. In *superego* humour the man is avoiding his castration. Not in Freudian speculation but in Freudian logic which is how the reader must take the story castration is indicated.

Sparing the fire is associated with renunciation of libidinal satisfaction, says Freud. In the orgy following the murder of the father the sons abandoned themselves to *jouissance*. Then, totems and taboos arrived, and the sons renounced *jouissance*. It was the moment of identification with the phallus which is associated with mortification of the body, that is, of symbolic castration. The phallus implicates symbolic castration. The phallus is not an organ that pisses.

If, as Freud says, women became the guardians of fire, it isn't because they cannot dissolve the identification in a flow of urine. The women supported the identification and became the guardians of castration.

8. Freudian ethics

Although a Freudian ethics as such is not elaborated - Freud would have held the idea in contempt, an ethical direction is quite graspable from his text. It is not in the direction of a traditional ethics based on the paternal metaphor. Such an enormously exalted signifier as the Father he finds painful. It is not in the direction of an ethics of the beautiful nor of some forms of the sublime.

Traditional ethics has an end which Freud calls, in Chapter II, the purpose of life: happiness which is traditionally situated in the field of pleasure. It is programmed by the pleasure principle. Freudian ethics is not in this direction. Given that the pleasure principle is the rule of the discourse of the unconscious, then the direction is not towards the unconscious. The unconscious is not the end of Freudian ethics.

One is inclined to conclude that traditional ethics is symptomatic. It is not necessarily symptomatic, but a part of the symptom is traditionalised by this ethics. Oh, how much our analysands are traditionalised! In so far as the analysand is

traditionalised, one is obliged to analyse the unconscious, but it is not the direction, not the end. It's an end not realisable in Freud's opinion. In Chapter II he gives a list of reasons why not: this end is subverted by pain, by forces of destruction, by our relations to other men. The principle reason comes in Chapter IV: the phallic function cannot support man in happiness.

9. Genital love and happiness

Work and love are two pillars of civilisation. Love leads to the development of the family providing the basis of communal life which work needs. Everyone knows that work can proceed without the family. Firms remain quite profitable with or without the family. There are better reasons for the existence of the family. Freud is talking about the locus in which tradition becomes symptomatic. He is talking about his doctrine of love. Freudian psychoanalysis is, in effect, a doctrine of love. The result of love is an unwillingness to be deprived of the sexual object, namely, the woman. For the woman, the result is an unwillingness to be deprived of that part of herself which has been separated off from her - her children. You see immediately that the result of love for the man and the woman is dissymmetrical. Through her children which are her objects she castrates the man.

How anyone in the post-Freudian movement can extract from this passage one contemporary aim of the treatment is surprising: genital love based on a satisfying object-relation. In this passage the man has a symptom which is the woman, and the woman has her children. Genital love becomes the prototype of happiness, says Freud, and since happiness is not the end of psychoanalysis nor is genital love.

Aim-inhibited love is not to Freud's taste and he has two objections. It is love displaced onto all men which firstly does an injustice to the sexual object, and secondly, not all men are worthy of love. Those who love all men are refusing to accept their castration since our discovery that the woman is the guardian of castration. It is not part of Freudian ethics to do an injustice to the woman. The man does an injustice by a refusal to accept his castration. In choosing a woman who wants to fuck a man, one has also chosen a guardian of castration. If the man wants one, he has to take both. One can add a risk which is to live in fear of the sublime object.

He says that the man in carrying out the business of civilisation requires instinctual sublimation, and the woman is not capable of it. Women have been carrying out the business of civilisation for a long time, and some significant few already when Freud was writing this text. He knew them. This passage can only be understood from a Lacanian perspective. In so far as instinctual sublimation designates loss of *jouissance*, the woman is not capable of it. She has her own *jouissance*, and it is in opposition not just to civilisation but to the phallic function. But, she also has a relation to the phallus. She carries out the business of civilisation in her relation to the phallus. In her relation to the phallus she is the guardian of castration, including herself as castrated. In her relation to her own *jouissance* she is not the guardian of castration. She does not lose it and preserves a relation of solitude to it. It is her solitude, and the man encounters it as sublime.

The man's phallic function has undergone an involution comparable, says Freud amusingly, to his hair and teeth. Phallic *jouissance* is an involuted function and does not support happiness. It supports an object-relation but not a satisfying one.