
The Kantian Critique of Psychoanalysis in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*

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Abstract:

“We cannot say they [psychoanalysts] are very jolly people; see the dead look they have, their stiff necks.” The tone and register Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari used in *Anti-Oedipus*, published in 1972, caused an immediate public reaction: it was regarded as a fatal and massive criticism of psychoanalysis. Nevertheless, *critique*, in philosophy, at least since Kant, is used in certain very technical and precise senses. Almost half a century later, it may possibly be determined whether *Anti-Oedipus* is indeed a critique of psychoanalysis and, eventually, in which sense it is so. We believe that, technically, it is a delimitation of a Kantian sort, an evaluation of a Nietzschean kind and, finally, a divergence with a Deleuzian slant. In this occasion, we will try to demonstrate how it is a Kantian critique and we will discover that the object of this critique it is not psychoanalysis in general but something much more accurate.

What kind of critique is present in *Anti-Oedipus*? What kind of form has it got?

For a simple reason, we again make use of Kantian terminology. In what he termed the critical revolution, Kant intended to discover criteria immanent to understanding so as to distinguish the legitimate and the illegitimate uses of the syntheses of consciousness. In the name of *transcendental* philosophy (immanence of criteria), he therefore denounced the transcendent use of syntheses such as appeared in metaphysics. In like fashion we are compelled to say that psychoanalysis has its metaphysics—its name is Oedipus.⁷

If *Anti-Oedipus* is a critique, it is so first in the way of *Critique of Pure Reason*. In what sense? Kant distinguished a legitimate and illegitimate use of the synthesis of consciousness according to whether the concepts of understanding are applied or not to experience. In one case, we build judgments which are perfectly appropriate, the scientific judgments; in the other, we build judgments that lead to alternatives impossible to resolve, the metaphysical judgments: “the soul is simple”, “the world is infinite”, “God is eternal”, whether they correspond to the paralogisms of psychology, the antinomies of cosmology, the ideal of theology. For this reason, the distinction between the legitimate and illegitimate uses of the synthesis equates to a distinction between science and metaphysics.

“In like fashion,” Deleuze and Guattari affirm, “we are compelled to say that psychoanalysis has its metaphysics—its name is Oedipus.”⁸ Psychoanalysis would also have its metaphysics and for that reason it would be necessary to proceed to a distinction between the uses of the syntheses. Which is that metaphysics? In the passage quoted above, the authors call it Oedipus. What do they refer to? To the fact psychoanalysis also considers an experience,

7. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 74-75.

8, *Ibidem*.

that of desire; it also proceeds to certain syntheses, those of the unconscious; and it also has at its disposal a category with which to operate on the syntheses, the concept of Oedipus. According to Deleuze and Guattari, there exist particularly three syntheses of the unconscious: the disjunctive synthesis of recording, the connective synthesis of production and the conjunctive synthesis of consumption. How do they each operate on desire? According to the so-called illegitimate use, the first registers whom it desires as man or woman.⁹ The second determines desire as desire of what one lacks or of what one is not, as desire of the opposite.¹⁰ And the third makes of the one who desires precisely a *who*; that is to say, a subject or a nation, for example, an entity identical to itself.¹¹ In effect, before belonging to a subject, desire is, in *Anti-Oedipus*, “the immanent cause or the self-production of man’s generic life in the unit of nature and of history”.¹² Actually, it exceeds even human nature and is coextensive with the real, in the way of the Spinozist *conatus* or the Bergsonian *élan vital*. Now, why is each of these operations considered an illegitimate use of the syntheses? Because, like the syntheses of reason, the syntheses of the unconscious would lead us to false alternatives (though may be not from a theoretical point of view): to be a man or a woman, or rather a perverse subject in the first case; to desire the opposite sex, or rather not desire, in the second case; to be a subject identical to itself, to own an identity, or rather the crudest solitude, in the third case.¹³ But what about

9. “It is first of all the synthesis of recording that in effect situates, on its surface of inscription within the conditions of Oedipus, a definable and differentiable ego in relation to parental images serving as coordinates (mother, father).” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 70.)

10. “Thus the parental or familial use of the synthesis of recording extends into a conjugal use, or an alliance use, of the connective syntheses of production (...).” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 70.)

11. “There is therefore a *segregative use* of the conjunctive syntheses of the unconscious... is this use that brings about the feeling of ‘indeed being one of us’...” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 103.)

12. Guillaume Sibertin-Blanc, *Deleuze et l’anti-Œdipe. La production du désir* (Paris: PUF, 2010), 17. (Our translation.)

13. “...which is called surmounting Oedipus, but reproducing it as well, transmitting it rather than dying all alone, incestuous, homosexual, and a zombie.” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 71.)

desire which is not desire of the opposite sex and yet it desires? What about that desire which has no mark of gender? And what about an individual who does not have an identity or identify him or herself with any? For all these cases it is necessary to give place to a different use of the syntheses. It is not a question of choosing out of the false alternatives, which would mean resolving Oedipus, but of putting together the alternatives so as to discover the legitimate use of the syntheses, which would mean dissolving or destroying Oedipus. What does, then, this new use of the syntheses consist of; the so-called “legitimate”? Of the comprehension of desire as a desire that do not know of privation, genders or identities, a desire that means to want without determinations, in full positivity, a desire which is simply creation. Then, three are the syntheses of the unconscious and three are, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the alternatives their illegitimate uses enclose us in: to be a man or a woman or resign sexuality, desire what we are not or resign desire, own an identity or resign community life. Oedipus is the name of all this. And *paralogisms* is the name Deleuze and Guattari give, according to Kant’s undoubtedly very free use yet not object of study here, to the three false alternatives, since they do not concern the world or God, cosmology and theology, but, in a wider sense, the soul and psychology.¹⁴

Anti-Oedipus is a critique, yet in a technical and accurate sense. It is a critique of Kantian style in the sense that it tries to distinguish an illegitimate use of the synthesis, not of reason, but of the unconscious. Now, while the form of the critique was being specified at the same time the matter was being determined. The object of critique is not simply psychoanalysis but rather psychoanalysis as metaphysics, as dogma. It is not psychoanalysis *tout court*, but the quick application of Oedipus to any phenomenon.

14. It is not mere chance that Deleuze and Guattari present three syntheses for, as it can be seen *Kant’s Critical Philosophy*, Deleuze always appreciated the 1971 edition of the *Critique*, where we effectively find three syntheses: that of apprehension in the intuition, reproduction in the imagination and that of recognition in the concept. It is true that later, in *Anti-Oedipus*, two more *paralogisms* will be mentioned (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 114 and 129). Yet, they can be considered as less strict extensions for they are not made to correspond to any new synthesis of the unconscious.

Freud had his reasons, it will be said though. He does not *invent* Oedipus, but *discovers* it. And after a conscientious, thorough and varied observation, he confirms it again and again. It is only for this reason that he institutes it as a complex. Freud, in one word, is making science. Yet it is, in effect, one way of making science what constitutes the *Anti-Oedipus*' target, a science that proceeds to the identification of constants and the determination of universals. It is the science Bergson tried to limit to the manipulation of the matter through intelligence and that he opposed to metaphysics, but in a sense different from Kant's. Metaphysics was for Bergson the discipline able to capture change and the absolutely unique.¹⁵ Freedom, time, creation, the spirit were for him objects which did not admit scientific consideration, but metaphysical. Desire is, for Deleuze and Guattari, another similar object, for it is precisely a creative force. They simply do not proceed, like Bergson, according to a distinction between science and metaphysics. Yet, they do seek recourse to the Bergsonian thinking to distinguish a "major" science from a "minor" science, in the terms of *A Thousand Plateaus*,¹⁶ a science in search of constants and universals and a science in search of variations and singularities.¹⁷

Now, are there not amid the main references of *Anti-Oedipus* certain hints of "minor science"? Is not symptomology in general the activity that consists of delimiting a medical profile, a science of singularities? These questions make sense, yet not mainly,

15. Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Dover Publications, 2010), 7.

16. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987), 359 and 366.

17. It is true that in Bergson's most profound texts the relation between science and metaphysics is not exclusively of opposition but also of continuity and complementarity. (See, for example, Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 163.). Deleuze and Guattari's gesture is Bergsonian in that they apply Bergson's same method, namely the distinction between the heterogeneous and the homogeneous, in the interior of science; yet it is not, in the sense that there seems not to be a final continuity or complementarity between the two sciences, but, on the contrary, a relation of rivalry.

we insist, to settle a debate that exceeds completely the frame of this article but to gain some kind of accuracy in the understanding of that which, under this precise form, critique takes as its object. Let us turn to Dora's case as an example, the paradigmatic case that Deleuze and Guattari refer to. Freud shares with us his huge effort to distinguish hysteria from other forms of psychoneurosis.¹⁸ Then, in *Three Essays on Sexuality*, Freud acknowledges the merit of certain authors who refuse to collect in only one unit the cases enumerated there and prefer to outline the differences instead of the common features.¹⁹ And it is for these same reasons that Lacan insists Freud's works should not be considered as a system, even though Freud himself was compelled to fix certain principles and techniques, but as the gradual shaping of instruments in the form of trial and error.²⁰ We should be always guided, he insists, by the singularity of the case.²¹ Undoubtedly, on the other hand, these are hermeneutic recommendations that apply to one's own learning. Or are not Lacan's seminars entirely marked by calls to be prudent regarding determination of principles and constants? Thus, when in March 10th 1954's class, after presenting the Wolf Boy case and confessing she does not know where to set it well, Mme Lefort settled the question by stating "the wolf was evidently the devouring mother", Lacan took side with Jean Hyppolite, who would ask: "Do you think that the wolf is always the devouring

18. Sigmund Freud, "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria", in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume VII (1901-1905): A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays on Sexuality and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953), 41.

19. Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on Sexuality", in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume VII (1901-1905): A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays on Sexuality and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953), 137-138.

20. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique. 1953-1954*, trans. John Forrester (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2013), 1 and 11.

21. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique. 1953-1954*, 12 and 15.

mother?”²² Particular attention is to be drawn then on the ambiguous relationship Lacan has with the Oedipus complex. We know, as Roudinesco recalls it, that ever since his earliest reflection Lacan was cautious as regards its worth. He even does so at moments in terms very similar to Deleuze and Guattari’s. Thus, in 1970, he wonders whether it should be applied on equal terms to Moses as to Laius,²³ to Dora, Anna and Emma,²⁴ whether it does not lead to the reduction of something so rich. When he does so, besides, he does not do it for epistemological reasons, to substitute the complex for a metaphor, as it may seem to be in certain cases.²⁵ He does so, in a first moment, to nuance its universality from an empiric point of view. “When we study a mythology, for example one that might perhaps appear with respect to a Sudanese population, we discover that for them the Oedipus complex is just a rather thin joke.”²⁶

The problem is that, simultaneously, together with all these hints of a minor science, together with these marks of methodological prudence and of respect for the heterogeneity of the experience, it is possible to detect an interest in the determination of constants and universals. It is true: Freud’s distinction of hysteria from other psychoneurosis is the result of his discovery of a singularity impossible to fit former profiles. But once inside a profile, let us say, Dora’s dream for instance, Freud writes that “it is therefore of special importance to me to show that apparent exceptions (...) nevertheless lend fresh support to the rule which is in dispute.”²⁷ And in *Three Essays on Sexuality*, in effect, the merit of certain authors who refuse to collect in only one unit the cases enumerated there and prefer to outline the differences instead of the common features is acknowledged. But Freud continues: “it is impossible to overlook the existence of numerous intermediate examples of every type, so that we are driven to conclude that we

22. *Idem*, 101.

23. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2007), 117.

24. *Idem*, 99.

25. *Idem*, 112.

26. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book I: Freud’s Papers on Technique*, 86.

27. Freud, “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria”, 68.

are dealing with a connected series”.²⁸ For his part, it is true that Lacan expresses big holds barred regarding the Oedipus complex, both in an empirical and a transcendental sense. Yet in no case do these holds reach the law but simply tend to make of Oedipus its case. Oedipus is the first model Freud gave us, thinks Lacan. But everything is not there.²⁹ What is missing? The general form out of which Oedipus is a case: the Law. Therefore, the gradual abandonment of Oedipus in favor of notions like *the agent of castration* or *the master’s discourse*.³⁰ Yet rather than abandonment, it is a case of integration. Perhaps a clear example of this is the analysis of James Joyce’s case because, what is more, its presentation came three years after the publication of *Anti-Oedipus*. In that case, Joyce’s writing is explained from the point of view of the lack of a father or a father’s name, as compensation, as *suppléance*,³¹ as reparation of a mistake and restoration of normality.³² Not only, then, do the reserves of anthropological order keep the form of the concept, but the adjustments of transcendental order incorporate it and, in one sense, even enlarge it. Desire is still unthinkable without the law, explained by the law and submitted to the law.³³ From this point of view, the Freudian descriptions of what would mean a normal sexuality (not “lingering over the stage of touching”³⁴, not restricting the “pleasure of looking”³⁵ to the genitals, avoiding the relation between these and “the sexual use of lips and mouth”³⁶) are an antecedent of that positivist tendency that appears in Lacan’s teaching when in 1956, for example, he dreams of a time when “the minimal number of fundamental points of insertion between the

28. Freud, “Three Essays on Sexuality”, 138.

29. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book I: Freud’s Papers on Technique*, 17.

30. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 104-106 and 128.

31. Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire XXIII. Sinthome* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), 87-88, 94.

32. *Idem*, 92-95.

33. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 129.

34. Freud, “Three Essays on Sexuality”, 156.

35. *Ibidem*.

36. *Idem*, 150.

signifier and the signified necessary for a human being to be called normal” be discovered.³⁷ The nuances, the concerns, the reserves that express a sensibility in respect of the diversity of experience, should, therefore, be considered simultaneously together with the determination of principles and constants. To that Deleuze and Guattari address when they develop their critique of the psychoanalytical reason.

37. Lacan, *The Seminar III, The Psychoses*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997), 266-267.