

# Freud against Oedipus?

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There is a popular story, even among scholars, that tells us that Freudian psychoanalysis was founded at the very moment that Freud wrote to Fliess (in 1897) that he no longer believed in his *Neurotica*: 'Ich glaube an meine Neurotica nicht mehr.'<sup>1</sup> This story reads this declaration as follows: I no longer take the traumatic stories of my patients at face value, but rather interpret them as distorted expressions of Oedipal fantasies. In other words, this declaration must be understood as the result of the following reasoning: what my patients tell me is not factually true – nothing 'really' happened; if this is the case then the different psychopathological syndromes cannot be caused by traumatic (in particular sexual) events – in other words, my seduction theory is a mistake. We have, on the contrary, to lay bare the true meaning of these narratives by restoring the unconscious (Oedipal) themes and the instinctual mechanisms of which they are the expression; this is done in the free association that is the fundamental method of the psychoanalytic cure. It is clear that this version of the genesis of psychoanalytic thinking implies that Freud had already introduced the Oedipus complex in 1897 and that the latter is, in the strictest sense, the shibboleth of psychoanalytic metapsychology from the very beginning. If this were right, it would mean that Freud would have understood psychopathology *from the outset* as the result of the vicissitudes of the development of the (psychosexual) relations of the little child with its parents and the Oedipus complex that characterizes these relations as the most fundamental determining factor for human subjectivity.

This history is defended by both psychoanalysts and hard-core critics of psychoanalytic theory. I limit myself here to one (telling) example. Ernst Kris, in the introduction to the 1952 edition of Freud's *Letters to Wilhelm Fliess* and his 'Project for a Scientific Psychology', writes the following: 'In his letters [*Briefe an Wilhelm Fliess*], we learn that Freud's insight into the structure of the Oedipus complex, i.e. the core problem of psychoanalysis, was made possible by his self-analysis, which he began in the summer of 1897 during his stay in Aussee.'<sup>2</sup> Even Jeffrey Masson, who

regards the abandonment of the seduction theory as an 'assault on truth', does not dispute the fact that the abandonment of the seduction theory coincides with the discovery of the Oedipus complex.

Kris is correct: Freud had altered the direction of his thinking. Earlier, he had recognized the aggressive acts of parents against their children – for seduction was an act of violence. Now Freud had a new insight, that children had aggressive impulses against their parents.<sup>3</sup>

In this essay I will show that this narrative about the history of Freudian psychoanalysis is highly questionable. I will illustrate this through a close reading of some passages from the Dora case and through an analysis of some aspects of the 1905 edition of the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. This analysis will also make it possible to explain in what sense these early texts contain a 'Pathoanalysis of existence' in which the Oedipus complex plays no role whatsoever. On the contrary, Freud only introduces the Oedipus complex – or at least a fundamental aspect of it: the ambivalence towards the father – in his 1909 study of the Rat Man (*Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis*). On top of that, the clinical arguments that he uses to justify this introduction are far from self-evident. In discussing these arguments I will try to identify the 'logic' that is at the basis of the 'Oedipalization' of Freudian theory and briefly suggest some aspects of Freudian thinking that could have protected Freud himself against the Oedipal pitfall.

## The case of Dora

As already indicated, the traditional story about the historical origins of Freudian psychoanalysis implies that the Oedipus complex was part of Freudian theory from the very beginning. However, when we look at the texts that Freud published in the decade after 1897 – at least when we make the effort to look at the original editions of these texts – we find no reference whatsoever to the Oedipus complex.<sup>4</sup> Both *The Interpretation of Dreams* and the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, which were published in 1900 and 1905 respectively, were republished with

substantial additions in later years, and it is these later editions that we find in both the *Gesamtausgabe* and the *Standard Edition*.<sup>5</sup> In the *Gesamtausgabe* and the *Standard Edition* these texts do indeed contain Oedipal explanations and references to the central role of the famous complex for psychopathology, but all of these references were introduced into the later editions. In the 1905 edition of the *Three Essays*, for example, there is not one reference to the Oedipus complex. In the *Three Essays* all the references to the Oedipus complex were introduced in 1920, and then only in the footnotes. Whatever we think of the historiographical account that I am questioning here, its defenders thus have some explanation to do. More importantly, if my argument is accepted, there seems to be a Freudian psychoanalysis that is not Oedipal at all.

Before discussing the central role of the *Three Essays* in the idea of a non-Oedipal psychoanalysis, the point can be illustrated with a short analysis of some passages of the Dora case history (*Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*), which was also published in 1905 and which one can, without exaggeration, claim as a crucial link between *The Interpretation of Dreams* and the *Three Essays*. In the Dora case study Freud intended to show the importance of the analysis of dreams for the cure of hysterical patients (hence its first projected title: *Traum und Hysterie*). It is at the same time a kind of clinical complement to the *Three Essays* which takes *expressis verbis* hysteria as its basis of reflexion. Although it was published in 1905, Freud wrote it in 1901. The reasons for Freud's delay in its publication are obscure. But, whatever we make of this, both its conception and its publication largely date from after the alleged abandonment of the seduction theory in 1897. Hence it might come as a surprise that the text starts with an extremely positive reference to the 1895 *Studies on Hysteria* where we find the formulation and defence of this very theory. Freud confirms at the beginning of the *Analysis of a Fragment of a Case of Hysteria* that the psychic conditions for hysteria described in his and Breuer's *Studies on Hysteria* – psychic trauma, conflict between the affects and a disturbance in the sphere of sexuality<sup>6</sup> – are present in Dora. This passage seems to indicate that Freud is still defending here, in one (reformulated) way or another, his classical theory of seduction – but this has not ever received much attention from his interpreters, or from Freud scholars for that matter. The latter turn more eagerly to a few other passages in Dora's case history, those containing Oedipal themes. As these passages seem

to contradict my claim that the Oedipus complex was not yet part of Freudian theory in 1905 we need to examine them closely.

We may recall that Dora's history is structured around two dreams. Dora's first dream occurs a few days after an incident at a lake in which Dora slaps Herr K., a friend of the family, after he declares his love for her. In this dream, Dora is awoken by her father, their house on fire. Her mother does not want to leave the house without saving her jewellery box, but Dora's father objects and says: 'I refuse to let myself and my two children be burnt for the sake of your jewel-case.'<sup>7</sup> When asked about this dream, Dora tells Freud of a fight between her parents about a piece of jewellery. Her mother wanted tear-drop pearls to wear as earrings, but her father gave her a bracelet instead. Freud, then, introduces a link between the 'jewel-case' (and jewellery in general) and female genitals. Freud further remarks that Dora's mother is a former rival for her father's affections, and that she might want to 'give' her father what her mother refuses: her jewellery.<sup>8</sup> The Oedipal theme is clearly present in this dream, and Freud writes: 'I have shown at length elsewhere at what an early age sexual attraction makes itself felt between parents and children, and I have explained that the legend of Oedipus is probably to be regarded as a poetical rendering of what is typical in these relations.' According to Freud, it follows from all this that the dream expresses a revival 'of germs of feeling in infancy'<sup>9</sup> that have an Oedipal character. But is an Oedipal theme the same as providing an Oedipal explanation? What is the exact status of these Oedipal references?

Freud links the idea that Dora's father was trying to save her from a burning house with the fact that he used to wake her up as a child in the middle of the night to prevent her from wetting her bed.<sup>10</sup> He suggests that, apart from their obvious meanings, 'fire' and 'burning' have sexual connotations. According to Freud, Dora's father replaces Herr K., for whom Dora burns with desire.<sup>11</sup> It is against this 'fire' that Dora's father must protect her, in the same way that he protected her before against bed-wetting. Freud concludes: 'My interpretation was that she had at that point summoned up an infantile affection for her father so as to be able to keep her repressed love for Herr K in its state of repression.'<sup>12</sup> So the affection for her father, which goes back to an 'Oedipal' attachment in her youth, is a 'reactive symptom' in service of the repression.<sup>13</sup> Freud views the Oedipus myth as a poetic expression of something typical in relations between parents and children. However,

at no point does he claim that 'Oedipal relations' lie at the origin of Dora's 'petite hystérie'. On the contrary, the memory of this affection is only revived to help repress Dora's desire for Herr K. (and, more fundamentally, for Frau K.). At the centre of Dora's problematic – and Freud is quite clear about this – we find an *actual love* (for Herr and/or Frau K.) and not an infantile one for her father. At this point, then, Freud is still far removed from the theory of an Oedipus complex as the *nuclear* complex of all neuroses that, in principle, can provide insight into the fundamental dynamic of the entire field of pathology.<sup>14</sup>

### Sexual disposition and pathoanalysis

We should not conclude from all of this that the famous letter of 1897 has no special importance at all for the development of Freudian thinking. Having explained why he no longer believes in his *neurotica* – the disillusioning fact that no analysis could be brought to a satisfactory end; the absence of a reality index in the unconscious; the incredibly high number of perverts among the Viennese population that the truth of the theory would require; and the fact that the unconscious memory of childhood traumas does not surface even during the most extreme conditions of psychotic confusion<sup>15</sup> – Freud writes that giving up seduction as the exclusive cause of psychopathology in general (and hysteria in particular) brings a new factor to the fore: the idea of a constitutional disposition.<sup>16</sup> In this Freud looks back to an old Charcotian idea, but with one crucial difference. In 'My Views on the Part Played by Sexuality in the Aetiology of Neuroses' (1906) Freud characterizes the change in his thought after the abandonment of the seduction theory as follows:

Accidental influences derived from experience having thus receded into the background, the factors of constitution and heredity necessarily gained the upper hand once more; but there was this difference between my views and those prevailing in other quarters, that on my theory the 'sexual constitution' took the place of a 'general neuropathic disposition'.<sup>17</sup>

In 1897, a transition occurs in Freud's thoughts from trauma to disposition, but the primacy of sexuality remains untouched. Henceforth, this disposition is a *libidinal (sexual) constitution*. This allows us to clearly understand at least one crucial aspect of the importance, the meaning and the status of the first edition of the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. This edition articulates a general – typically human – sexual disposition, which is at the basis of hysteria.

What is this 'disposition'? What is its content? This 'hysterical disposition' is roughly composed of three elements: a strong version of bisexuality, both on the object and on the subject side (and we may recall that Freud's original title for what was to become the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* was *Die menschliche Bi-sexualität – Human Bisexuality*); the need to overcome (through idealization and repression) the permanent threat of contamination of the sexual by the excremental function; and the need to cope with the perverse (and homosexual) tendencies (viz. the partial drives) that intrinsically belong to human sexuality. Oedipal conflict, this much is clear, plays no part in this libidinal disposition.

But this is not the whole story. Through the study of hysteria Freud arrives at the idea of a *universal* human disposition, such that hysteria turns out to be, as it were, the 'royal road' to the understanding of humankind as such. Freud understood the symptoms of his hysterical patients as the disguised expression of perverse fantasies. Neurosis (hysteria), he writes, is the negative of perversion.<sup>18</sup> This also means – and this is essential to what we could call Freud's philosophical 'methodology' – that the sexual disposition that is at the basis of hysteria can only be properly studied from the perspective of the pathological variations of sexuality. This is why the first of the *Three Essays* focuses on the 'Sexual aberrations' (homosexuality and the traditional 'paraphilias'). On the one hand, these 'aberrations' demonstrate, for Freud, that sexuality has no natural object of its own. This insight further makes it possible for him to break away from the functional interpretation of sexuality that characterized sexology at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, it was only by breaking away from this functional interpretation that Freud could consider the tendencies – the partial drives – that underlie the different perversions as the building rocks of the sexual life of all human beings. That is, Freud regards the partial drives, which he discovers through the study of the perversions, as the constitutive elements of human sexuality as such.

The 'organic' repression of the partial drives<sup>20</sup> (the development of the reaction formations of shame and disgust) and the constitutive threat of contamination of the sexual by the excremental function are at the basis of hysteria; at the same time they characterize human sexuality as such. This seems to suggest that the argument of the *Three Essays* concerns not just the primacy of sexuality but even more so the primacy of the pathological for the study of the human being. Freud's claim for the primacy of sexuality is based

on the discovery that sexuality confronts us with a number of unsolvable problems and conflicts that are rooted in our biological constitution and that are at the basis of psychopathology. But this biological constitution can only be studied properly *starting from* pathology. The primacy of sexuality and the primacy of the pathological for the understanding of human existence are thus for Freud two sides of the same coin. This means that Freud's idea of the 'hereditary disposition' should not be understood as a genetic determination in the contemporary scientific sense, but rather as a complex field of problematics – a question or questions rather than an answer or answers – which we all share as human beings and that determines our existence. Its intensity or, maybe better, its urgency is not only subject to individual variation, but can also change in the course of our lives.

Freud's 'hysterical disposition' consists of a field of forces with which we all have to deal and for which there are no 'good' or 'ultimate' solutions, let alone a solution that would be inscribed in the very nature of this disposition. When it comes to psychosexuality, the early Freud is profoundly anti-Aristotelian: there is no intrinsic norm (inscribed in the very nature of our sexual existence) that would allow us to determine once and for all what the outcome of (psycho-) sexual development should be. We should rather understand the sexual body in Deleuzian terms as a 'disjunctive synthesis'; the interactions between the different partial drives that are inscribed in it do not themselves aim for a predetermined goal to which they should in the end (at least ideally) all be subordinated.<sup>21</sup> The (sexual) body is, on the contrary, a constitutive field of forces with an ever-changing strength and intensity that in principle never gives us any rest. This 'disposition' is the topic of Freud's *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, a disposition on which psychoanalysis has no grip and which it cannot change. We can, according to Freud, resolve the symptoms of our patients but not the disposition in which these symptoms find their origin. Humans, so much is clear, are first and foremost 'sick animals'.

### **From hysteria to psychosis and obsessional neurosis**

As long as Freud used hysteria as the sole paradigm to understand human existence, the Oedipus complex played no role in psychoanalytic thinking. But even in the *Three Essays*, where the exclusive emphasis on hysteria falls away, Freud is still far removed from the idea of an Oedipus complex that at least in principle

shows us what the outcome of psychosexual development ought to be. The first edition of the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, together with the Dora case history, was a culminating point in the development of Freudian thinking. Things changed soon afterwards. And quite drastically! Dora is Freud's last case study of a hysterical patient. After 1905 Freud turned his attention to psychosis and to obsessional neurosis. There are many reasons – both internal and external – for this shift. The external reasons concern us less here. I will just recall that Freudian psychoanalysis constantly resonates in many (and complex) ways with the history of psychiatric thought and that after 1905 hysteria, at least in the Charcotian sense, quickly disappeared from the psychiatric agenda. Its symptoms were redistributed among other new categories such as schizophrenia.<sup>22</sup> More interesting are the internal reasons for this change in Freud's interest.

The first edition of the *Three Essays* left open some important problems that still needed to be solved. In Freud's early theory, infantile sexuality is considered to be auto-erotic, which, for Freud, means 'without an object' (*Objektlos*). Infantile sexuality is in this way reduced to pleasurable bodily experiences that can be described in purely physiological terms.<sup>23</sup> As a result infantile sexuality is also not phantasmatic. For Freud, phantasmatic scenarios essentially imply a relation to an object. According to the early Freud, phantasmatic activity only starts at the beginning of puberty when sexuality finds its object. In the first edition of the *Three Essays* the sexual drive's discovery of an object at the beginning of puberty is not considered to be a special problem. The sexual drive finds its object by 'leaning on' (*Anlehnung*) the drives of self-preservation. At the beginning of puberty the parental figures, which up until then took care of the child, are almost automatically and unproblematically invested in by the sexual drive.<sup>24</sup>

But Freud soon realized that things might be much more complicated. Psychotic experience showed him that the affective ('libidinal') relation to the external world, together with the ego that supports it, can be absent from the beginning or destroyed later on in life and that it is far from guaranteed. But if this is the case, the question of how sexuality finds an object becomes much more urgent than Freud had previously realized.<sup>25</sup> This question is intrinsically linked to another: how does the subject or the ego – Freud does not make a distinction here – find its unity, if the original situation is one of random bodily objects and partial drives? In order to solve these problems – and

in complete agreement with the patho-analytic approach – Freud now turns to the study of psychosis and obsessional neurosis.

I will first concentrate on psychosis, since it is the pathology in which the problem of (the genesis of) the relation between a (unified) ego and the external world is dramatized to the extreme. Freud's theory of the ego is, at least in some respects, the mirror image of his reflections on sexuality in 1905. As in the case of sexuality, Freud breaks with a functional understanding of the ego. Just as with sexuality, the ego should not be understood from a functional (and more particularly adaptive) point of view. Even if the ego informs us about the reality in which we live and allows our adaptation to it, this is not the perspective according to which Freud wants to understand and conceptualize the ego at this stage of his thinking. Hence,

for instance, in 'My Views on the Part Played by Sexuality in the Aetiology of Neuroses', Freud introduces the ego exclusively as a defensive instance.<sup>26</sup> Generally, Freud's reflections on psychosis, and more particularly his reflections on narcissism, lead to a 'deconstruction' of the ego that in a certain sense repeats his early deconstruction of sexuality. Or, more concretely, just as sexuality in the early texts is rethought as a conflictual field of opposing forces (in contradistinction to a function with a clear and determined goal), so the ego now appears to be essentially built up by conflicting identifications, so that it can no longer be reduced to an adaptive function.

A detailed analysis of Freud's texts on narcissism, which were published between 1910 and 1915, would lead us too far astray. But a brief examination of a passage in Freud's discussion of the case of Schreber (1911), where he introduces narcissism in a more extensive way for the first time, shows that the above analogy between sexuality and the ego, in the final analysis, has some serious limitations. Freud writes, for example:

There comes a time in the development of the individual at which he ... begins by taking himself, his



own body, as his love-object, and only subsequently proceeds from this ... half-way phase between auto-eroticism and object-love ... to heterosexuality.<sup>27</sup>

This passage can teach us many things. First, it clearly indicates in what respect the introduction of narcissism is meant to show (infantile) sexuality its way to the object. As a result, infantile sexuality is no longer without an object. Second, this introduction goes along with a developmental perspective that was almost completely absent from the 1905 edition of the *Three Essays*. Indeed, in that edition Freud only mentions two 'developmental phases': infantile masturbation and its return when the child is 3 years old, and he does not attribute much value to them. Second, and most importantly, the reference to a structural and invincible bisexuality, which was central to the hysterical disposition, is replaced by an opposition between hetero- and homosexuality, in such a way that it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that heterosexuality is the 'normal' (normative) outcome of the evolution at hand. The only thing Freud now needs to explain is how the homosexual position gives way to a heterosexual one. This is the role of the Oedipus complex.

### The introduction of the Oedipus complex

Freud introduces the Oedipus complex for the first time in his study on the Rat Man in 1909. Or, more correctly, Freud articulates in this case study (and in the study on *Senatspräsident Schreber* that was published a few years later, in 1911) what he calls the *father complex* – the ambivalent relationship to the father – which is an essential element of what will become, in later years, the Oedipus complex.<sup>28</sup> It is only at this point of his intellectual development that Freud puts the problem of the law – of the father who says ‘no’ to the auto-erotic pleasures of the infant – and the opposition between love and hatred, that for Freud goes along with it, at the centre of his thought.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, according to Freud, this dynamic opposition, which is an essential aspect of an ‘obsessional disposition’, plays a crucial role in the pathogenesis of obsessional neurosis in general, in the study of the Rat Man in particular.<sup>30</sup> What does this mean and, more importantly, is it as self-evident as Freud himself suggests?

One no doubt remembers the fits of anger that structure the history of the Rat Man from his early childhood onwards. Whenever the Rat Man cannot satisfy his libido he falls pray to an extreme anger that he directs towards the object that causes it: his father who forbids masturbation; the old professor who got the room in the sanatorium next to the room of a nurse whom the Rat Man fancied; the grandmother of his fiancée after the latter went to visit the former... Freud understands these events in the clinical part of the case study of the Rat Man consistently in terms of *anger*.<sup>31</sup> He writes, for instance, that the outbursts show ‘a tremendous feeling of rage, which was inaccessible to the patient’s consciousness and was directed against someone who had cropped up as an interference with the course of his love’.<sup>32</sup> But anger is not hate. Anger is an affect that can occur whenever one feels treated unjustly or when we cannot have something we think we are entitled to. This anger can be abreacted against any object that is at hand. Anger is an acute condition that passes once it has been abreacted. Its object – just like the object of the sexual drive? – is completely subordinate to its goal. It can easily be replaced by another. The object has no value in itself. This is not the case with hatred (or with love for that matter). Hatred is a *passion* that has a permanent object that cannot easily be replaced by another one. The hatred against one person cannot be satisfied by destroying an object or another person, as is the case with anger. But this obvious difference does not prevent Freud in

the theoretical part of his case study on the Rat Man from re-qualifying what he first called anger in terms of sadism and hatred. So Freud writes, for instance,

[T]he sadistic components of love have, from constitutional causes, been exceptionally strongly developed, and have consequently undergone a premature and all too thorough suppression and ... the neurotic phenomena we have observed arise on the one hand from conscious feelings of affection which have become exaggerated as a reaction, and on the other hand from sadism persisting in the unconscious in the form of hatred.<sup>33</sup>

As a result the Rat Man’s anger against his father, against the old professor and against his fiancée’s grandmother can now be rethought as expressions of a permanent hatred of one and the same passion. In addition, the objects of this anger are now reinterpreted as replacements of always the same object: the Rat Man’s father.

The reasons for this confusion between hate and anger should not occupy us here, but it is clear that it has important consequences. As long as Freud considered infantile sexuality as essentially autoerotic, the Oedipus complex, as the formative complex of subjectivity in early childhood, was literally unthinkable. The study of psychosis made Freud give up the idea that infantile sexuality has no object. His (problematic) interpretation of obsessional neurosis taught Freud, in addition, that the father (and the parental figures in general) plays a crucial and predominant role in the development of the infantile libido towards its objects. From now on, all elements are in place to understand psychopathology (and the construction of subjectivity for that matter) as intrinsically dependent on the libidinal relations of the little child with its parents – the Oedipus complex.

There is not enough space to articulate all the consequences, on both a metapsychological and a clinical level, of this change in perspective. I will limit myself to a general hypothesis instead: from 1909 onwards the sexual body as a constitutive field of forces with an ever-changing strength and intensity, which in principle never gives us any rest, becomes progressively inscribed in an Oedipal logic that concretizes the reference to the law (of the father) just mentioned. The partial drives, for instance, are now thought of as phases in a development that – at least ideally – aims at their integration in a (again ideally) heterosexual relation (which is, furthermore, claimed to be based upon the evolutionary history of humankind). The different psychopathologies, including hysteria, are conceived as failed attempts to overcome the

Oedipal problematic. It is not always clear whether this failure has a structural or a contingent character, but, whatever the case may be, the problematic of the Oedipus complex shows us the ideal (heterosexual) outcome of our psychosexual development. In this way, Freud reintroduces a normative element, which was not present in his theories between 1897 and 1909. Indeed, in these theories there was no intrinsic norm that would allow us in any way whatsoever to 'judge' the outcome of our psychosexual history. This outcome itself could not be anything else but the contingent result of the interaction between our 'hysterical' disposition and the contingent encounters through which this disposition concretely takes shape.

### **I'm a Freudian, get me out of here**

The first (1905) version of Freud's *Three Essays* articulates a non-Oedipal psychoanalysis. As such it still has a definite 'emancipatory' potential. Freudian psychoanalysis is not Oedipal in its very nature. It is only from 1909 onwards (that is, roughly speaking, starting with the study on the Rat Man and through the introduction of the law of the father and of the Oedipus complex) that psychoanalysis tends to become a sophisticated defence of what Freud first called 'the popular opinion' about sexuality. It was precisely this 'popular opinion' that psychoanalysis originally was meant to deconstruct. Is there a Freudian escape – that is an escape that remains not so much within the Freudian orthodoxy, but at least within its inspiration – from this impasse?

There is. Freudian psychoanalysis is a pathoanalysis. According to Freud, we can only understand the human being through the study of psychopathology. Indeed, according to Freud psychopathology shows us in an exaggerated way the fundamental problematics – one can think here of the hysterical and obsessional dispositions discussed above – that characterize human existence as such. This idea implies, at least in principle, that *different* pathologies illustrate *different* problematics. But Freud does not remain really faithful to this idea. Over and over again, Freud privileges one particular pathology, in order to understand human existence in general and human pathology in particular. The turn towards psychosis and obsessional neurosis did not lead to the articulation of a new disposition *next to* the hysterical disposition that Freud discovered first, but it led to the articulation of a new universal 'key' to the understanding of human nature as such. The fundamental elements of the hysterical disposition

became redefined and neutralized in the process: the partial drives and erogenous zones are reintegrated in a developmental scheme and the bisexuality that was crucial to the understanding of hysteria reappears in the positive and negative versions of the Oedipus complex that is itself supposed to install a heterosexual relationship. As a result, hysteria itself became progressively understood according to an Oedipal – that is obsessional – paradigm. If Freud had stuck to his original pathoanalytic credo, he would have realized that the problematic that is at the basis of obsessional neurosis – important as it may be – is only one among others and that it only plays a predominant role in one particular pathology. At best it is this pathology, and this pathology alone – obsessional neurosis – that can be understood on the basis of our relation to the law and hence, at least according to Freud, in Oedipal terms.

If Freud had respected more systematically his own pathoanalytic inspiration, the Oedipus complex could never have become the shibboleth of psychoanalysis. Obviously my pathoanalytic rereading of Freud does not solve all the problems regarding the status of the Oedipus complex in Freudian metapsychology. For one thing, it is far from clear why the law has essentially to be the law of the father. This identification of the law with the father seems to be the result of another 'original sin' that consists in situating (a particular type of) the family 'before' culture.<sup>34</sup> Here, too, Freud might have thought differently (might have known better?) if he had taken seriously the lessons from hysteria, instead of covering them up with the Oedipus complex. Freud's early theories of sexuality don't imply that *in sexualibus* 'anything goes'. Quite the contrary, his understanding of the reaction formations (shame, disgust, guilt...) explains why the experience of sexuality is never without inherent limitations and why it is essentially conflictual. Does this not also imply that sexuality is inevitably subject to a (historical and contingent) law? Indeed Freud not only says that experiences of shame, guilt, disgust and so on belong to the very nature of sexuality, but also that the content of these experiences – *what* it is exactly we consider to be disgusting or shameful – depends to a high degree on the social and cultural prohibitions that structure our lives.<sup>35</sup> This implies that every culture is confronted with the inevitable task of providing concrete content to these experiences. But nowhere does Freud state that this culture is essentially patriarchal as the theory of the law of the father and the Oedipus complex teach us. What exactly will be forbidden and the status of

the law that forbids both depend on ever-changing cultural circumstances. It seems that not only are Freud's texts less Oedipal than is generally believed, but these texts also contain the necessary elements for thinking a 'non-Oedipal' psychoanalysis. Freud against Oedipus? Yes indeed.

## Notes

1. Freud writes 'Ich glaube an meine *Neurotica* nicht mehr' and not 'Ich glaube an meine *neurotische Patientin* nicht mehr'. Since *Neurotica* is a Latin ablative, it is clear that Freud is referring here – as Strachey rightly remarks in the *Standard Edition* – to his seduction theory of neurosis and not to the stories his patients told him (as one finds even in recent French translations). So what Freud no longer believed in 1897 was that psychopathology is inevitably caused by traumatic (sexual) events. This does not come as a surprise when we realize that hardly any of Freud's patients spontaneously came up with stories about sexual traumas. Freud always had to go – and quite insistently – in search of these traumas. Freud did so because he was convinced – for theoretical reasons – that he would find them if only he looked for them. See for this problematic Tomas Geyskens, *Our Original Scenes: Freud's Theory of Sexuality*, Leuven University Press, Leuven, 2005; A. Esterson, 'The Mythologizing of Psychoanalytic History: Deception and Self-deception in Freud's Accounts of the Seduction Theory Episode', *History of Psychiatry*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2001, pp. 329–52.
2. Ernst Kris, Einleitung zur Erstausgabe, in Sigmund Freud, *Briefe an Wilhelm Fließ* (1952), Fischer, Frankfurt am Main, 1985, p. 545, my translation.
3. Jeffrey Masson, *The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory*, HarperCollins, New York, 1992, pp. 112–13.
4. But the same is true for the texts of this period that were posthumously published. One could think here of the *Letters to Fließ* (*Briefe an Wilhelm Fließ*).
5. It is not only always the last edition of Freud's texts that we find in the *Gesamtausgabe* and the *Standard Edition*; it is also that we find these editions in the volumes that should contain the original editions. Hence, for example, we find the last edition of the *Three Essays*, which is almost twice as long as the original and which was published in 1924, in the volume that contains Freud's texts from 1905, the date of the publication of the first version of this text.
6. Sigmund Freud, *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, *Standard Edition*, vol. 7, Hogarth Press, London, 1905, p. 24.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 73–4.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
14. I will not comment here on the references to the Oedipal myth in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, except to say that it is clear that even if the Oedipal theme is considered to have a universal character in this book, it is by no means thought to be the universal key for the understanding of pathology and for the access to culture. See M. Leonard, 'Freud and Tragedy: Oedipus and the Gender of the Universal', *Classical Receptions Journal*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2013, pp. 63–83.
15. *Briefe an Wilhelm Fließ*, p. 284.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
17. Sigmund Freud, 'My Views on the Part Played by Sexuality in the Aetiology of the Neuroses', *Standard Edition*, vol. 7, Hogarth Press, London, 1905, pp. 275–6.
18. Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, *Standard Edition*, vol. 7, p. 165.
19. See Arnold Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2001, *passim*.
20. 'My Views on the Part Played by Sexuality in the Aetiology of the Neuroses'.
21. See P. Moyaert, 'Seksualiteit is niet te integreren: Hoe Freud over de *conditio humana* nadenkt', in P. Van Haute and J. De Vleminck, eds, *Freud als Filosoof*, Pelckmans, Antwerp, 2013.
22. M. Micale, 'On the "Disappearance" of Hysteria. A Study In the Clinical Deconstruction of a Diagnosis', *Isis* 84, 1993, pp. 496–526.
23. It is true that Freud also writes in 1905 that the breast is the initial object of infantile sexuality. However, it is clear from the context that infantile sexuality is not directed towards this object as such. The object only plays a role in as far as it is instrumental for bodily pleasure. The image that best expresses infantile sexuality – Freud leaves us no doubt about this – are the lips kissing each other. For a more detailed explanation of this problem, see Philippe Van Haute and Tomas Geyskens, *Confusion of Tongues: The Primacy of Sexuality in Freud, Ferenczi and Laplanche*, Other Press, New York, 2004.
24. This also explains why Oedipal themes – which, I repeat, are not the same as an Oedipus complex – in the first edition of the *Three Essays* belong to puberty and not to childhood, as will be the case once Freud introduces the Oedipus complex.
25. We would have to explain here why Freud considers the relation to reality that is lost in psychosis 'libidinal' (and hence sexual). We know that in psychosis the relation of self-preservation can continue to exist while at the same time the affective ('meaningful') relation to the external world is destroyed. But the logic of Freud's dualistic drive-theory forces him to consider every relation to reality or towards the other (or loss thereof) that cannot be reduced to self-preservation to be sexual in its very nature. This is of course far from self-evident. Suffice it to say here that Freud does not have a convincing theory of attachment. See on this Philippe Van Haute and Tomas Geyskens, *From Death Drive to Attachment Theory: The Primacy of the Child in Freud, Klein and Hermann*, Other Press, New York, 2007.
26. Indeed, it is difficult to conceptualize repression, for example, without an ego.
27. Sigmund Freud, 'Psychoanalytic Remarks on an Auto-biographically Described Case of Paranoia (*Dementia paranoides*)', *Standard Edition*, vol. 12 Hogarth Press, London, 1911, pp. 60–61.
28. Especially in 'Das Ich und das Es' (*The Ego and the Id*, *Standard Edition*, vol. 19, Hogarth Press, London, 1923), where it receives its most complete formulation.
29. The reason for this shift is in a certain sense simple: this problematic characterizes obsessional neurosis, which, together with psychosis – and at the expense of hysteria – is at the centre of Freud's reflections in the years from 1908 to 1915.
30. We leave out the discussion on the exact status of aggressivity – is it of a sexual nature or not? – which plays a crucial role in Freud's texts we are discussing here. On this question, see J. De Vleminck, *De schaduw van Kaïn. Freuds klinische antropologie van de agressiviteit*, Universitaire Pers, Leuven, 2013.
31. Sigmund Freud, *Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis*, *Standard Edition*, vol. 10, Hogarth Press, London, 1909, p. 182.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 258.
34. Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, *Standard Edition*, vol. 13, Hogarth Press, London, 1912–13.
35. Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, p. 151.