

Serge Leclaire The Truth Criterion

I would like to sincerely thank, on the one hand, Madame Piera Aulagnier for having recalled so clearly and in such striking fashion, the crux of the psychoanalytic position on the subject of identity and desire; and on the other, Monsieur Patrick Guyomard who so brilliantly illustrated the modalities and possibilities of psychoanalytic work as applied to situations of adoption and artificial insemination*.

These two contributions will allow me to limit myself to an attempt to analyze a point that seems to have posed a problem for group V of the High Council, the biological truth criterion.

The current state of knowledge, as Madame Françoise Heritier-Auge reminded us, shows that, among the four criteria which determine filiation in our tradition, namely: the criterion of legitimate parenthood legitimized (and even naturalized) by marriage; the common law criterion; the criterion of will; and the biological truth criterion, the tendency is to exaggerate the importance of the latter by granting a dominant truth-value to "biological truth".

Here, from the outset, we witness the return of the question of the opposition between a "natural" order, biological in this case, and a "social" order about which we have just been reminded "there is nothing natural about social organization".

* At the time of my talk I had not yet heard Guy Rosalato's contribution which substantially broadened the psychoanalytic point of view.

I will therefore pause to examine "order", the common denominator of the terms which are in opposition. Whatever predicate specifies it, order consists of a symbolic organization. The present state of science and of biology in particular, bears adequate witness to the fact that biological order, if not biological "truth", consists, above all, in an organization of symbols (names, numbers or letters) assigned to elements made visible by experimentation: cells, molecules, proteins, antibodies, etc., which can thus be identified.

Natural order in general and living (biological) order in particular, can today be read as a symbolic order, a system of laws and, as such, does not intrinsically differ from social order: symbolic reality, "human nature" as, essentially, a domain of speech, language and writing, is at work there.

To put it simply and briefly, I would say that the opposition between nature and culture today takes the shape of an opposition between two different types of symbolic activity.

The first type, to which scientific research and production belong, has as its top priority to discover and account for the order of things so as to deduce a practice, a utilization, an exploitation of "the riches of nature". The second type, to which social practice belongs in all of its aspects, political and especially ethical (regulation of the relationships among subjects, men and women, individuals and groups), should have as its priority to institute the determining function of the symbolic order in the ordering of the relationships among subjects. The legislator's work belongs to this second type of symbolic activity.

While there seems to be today no difficulty or obstacle to the deployment of a symbolic order that "accounts for", as witnessed by the successes of science and its production of the semblance of a universal language, we find it very difficult, in the current state of our civilization, to implement, other than through archaic forms, the work of the symbolic which "orders" human activity and relationships. Not without reason is this primordial function of the symbolic mistrusted. It is because it continues to be perceived and experienced as something partaking of a supernatural, transcendent order which in fact deprives "human nature" of its essential quality of speaking being. Under the pretext of legitimately challenging the tenacious belief that the word can only come "from above" (from a sky, a God, a church or a State, a prophet or a master), we go so far as to challenge, in the same motion, any power to order the symbolic

order.

Since its foundation, psychoanalysis has asserted itself as a practice which seeks to rehabilitate the virtues of the word. Within each cure it strives to give (back to) the subject the opportunity to speak *. Psychoanalysis thus challenges any belief or ideology which attributes the origin of ownership of language to some supreme being. The psychoanalyst works with speech and language as primordial constitutive elements of human nature, just as a biochemical therapist brings into play molecular interactions thanks to modern pharmaceuticals. This is how the psychoanalyst is able to describe an experience which, in more ways than one, partakes of a chemistry of signifiers (or an alchemy of words) rather than of a "magic" of language. It is also why he is today probably the only practitioner to systematically implement a rational technique based on a "natural" theory of speech and language. Of course, the logic which governs it can be surprising because it considers the meaning of speech to be secondary, granting a privileged status to the elementary nature of words, their "signifying" values, their molecular functions to put it metaphorically, which have no "meaning" other than the qualities representative of their belonging to the hypercomplex system of speech and language, the only one able to account for the fundamental nature of the subject (of the subject-effect, strictly speaking) other than in the *Translator's note: ("rendre la parole au sujet": parole as speech but also as a psychoanalytical subject's ability to turn the symptom back into an utterance) mode of a pure intuition or an ideological construct. In brief, the subject, in the psychoanalytical sense of the term, is the irreducible difference which maintains the "pressure" of the formidable energetic system of desire, the one no machine will ever be able to duplicate.

In any human procreation, natural or artificial, blind or farsighted, this energy is at work. We should consider it a parameter not to be circumvented in our work, which usefully specifies the "criterion of will". It will be understood, or at least intuited, that this approach to the living human allows for a productive re-thinking of the obstacle encountered by the High Council and which consists in, let us recall, the tendency to "exaggerate the importance of the biological truth criterion and give it a dominant value".

How? First of all by relativizing the "weight of truth" of the biological criterion whose power of attraction and even fascination owes as much to the mastery of a symbolic order it puts into play, as it does to the reality of the processes it accounts for. The technique this procedure allows, and the practice it produces, engender a truth effect in the strongest sense of the term (adequatio rei intellectu) but it is a truth that relates to objects which certainly do determine the process of reproduction. However, it leaves out the truth of "subjects", the hard nuclei of the system of desire at work in reproduction and veritable "objects" of the symbolic order, the one that regulates and orders relationships among people. Here, it is possible to grasp the crux of the problem we encounter in our work, a difficulty which arises moreover each time the question of ethics is considered (all too rarely, it is true!). The ethical order, as I see it, consists in a body of laws and rules which govern the "hypercomplex system" of relationships among subjects, and therefore tells "how to live with the other". It is based on a conception of human nature which differs according to civilizations and eras, always influenced by the current state of beliefs and knowledge, affected by cultural experience and interactions. No matter its foundations, its substance is essentially symbolic, written or spoken laws or rules. These laws concern an object (human nature or subject) whose reality is substantially conditioned or determined by the ideas held about this object, if not by the laws themselves. It is commonplace nowadays to point out that the great systems of belief or thought (religious, philosophical, or even political) which, in the course of history, have assured the remarkable cohesiveness of important human groups (civilizations, societies) through the "view of man and the world" they proposed or imposed, have now lost, if not their dogmatic cohesiveness and nostalgic claim to universality, at least a great part of their power and credibility: "a crisis of ethics" which, for my part, I would call a crisis of the power of the symbolic.

It is only natural then that the ethical demand should be addressed to a type of symbolic system with a proven coherence and effectiveness: scientific discourse. For lack of an answer to the question, "how do we live with the other?", at least some echo can be expected to the question, "how do we live in good health?" if it is addressed to medical discourse's imposing system of knowledge! To my mind, it is from this displacement of the demand toward the place where the power of the symbolic has proven itself – the power of accounting for experimental data – that the excessive weight of the biological truth criterion we

face derives.

How to acquire the means to overturn this momentum, to rehabilitate a power of the symbolic in its legitimate place, the subject not the object, is the question to which the psychoanalyst can contribute.

It simply involves recognizing that the object of the human sciences in general and of psychoanalysis in particular has its own consistency which depends on a non-ideological conceptual elaboration which is neither religious nor metaphysical or scientific; that is to say, an elaboration which is pertinent to the realities it addresses; realities which essentially consist of relationships; fantasies, drives and desires, among terms which can be conceptualized but not objectified: subject (of desire), (unconscious) thought, object (of the drive).

To nevertheless make use of "scientific" metaphors, I would say that our physics of human nature (physics of physis: nature) would belong to the order of speech and language, its atoms, words or phonemes and its elementary particles, "signifiers". Psychoanalysis is a systematic approach to a space made up of dimensions other than those which account for the geometry of a three or four dimensional world. The reality of this no less "natural" space is made of "dimensions" (memory, forgetting, drives, desires) for which the categories of quantity and measure are not pertinent. The concepts derive from phenomena such as repetitions, resistances, memory lapses, reminiscences, mutations, spotted "in vivo" in the unfolding of the cure, which allow the extraction of structural constants, of specific conditions of interactions, and more generally of the elaboration (keeping to my scientific metaphors) of a physiology of the signifier which more closely resembles a hypercomplex and unstable immunological system than a pyramidal and unifying explanatory system.

But here, at least in this type of practice and elaboration, the symbolic is at work in its primary aim of affirming or causing the ever-present re-emergence of the human thing.

Even in the procedures of artificial fertilization, desire is at work, not only in the project of procreating in the face of certain physiological or accidental handicaps, but also in scientific elaboration and the techniques it is able to perfect. The components of desire's movement may vary but its conditions remain constant.

To introduce among the determining criteria of filiation a "desire criterion" seems to me a simple way to concretize, in "recommendations" or even in a regulation if not a law, the weight of a symbolic truth considerably more determining for the human thing than a biological reality whose truth function is but relative and only becomes exalted, as I think I have shown, by default.

It remains to be seen how to account for the force of desire in terms that do not surreptitiously reintroduce religious, metaphysical or even scientific hypotheses. The vocabulary of psychoanalysis or, better yet, the conceptual framework it has been forging with Freud, Lacan and many others, may help, if only this undertaking is remembered by our interlocutors... and by ourselves. As for me, it is what I do wish for.

I would like, in any case, to thank Madame Françoise Heritier-Auge and the High Council for having initiated this meeting, and express the hope that it will have an impact.