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Johan Eriksson^a

^a Gröndalsvägen 27, 117 66, Stockholm, Sweden

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The form of the soul — on the body in Freud's psychoanalysis

Johan Eriksson*

Gröndalsvägen 27, 117 66, Stockholm, Sweden

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To formulate the problem of the relation between body and soul in terms of how one should understand the relation between consciousness and the brain, or in terms of explaining how mind can arise out of matter, is a modern and far from innocent tendency that has instigated the whole spectrum of theories and answers suggested by the philosophy of mind of the so-called Analytic tradition during the 20th century. During the last 5 decades, we have seen a number of attempts at incorporating Freud into this discussion about the relation between body and soul. In this article, the author develops an argument according to which the philosophy of mind of the Analytic tradition is not really an appropriate intellectual environment for Freud's theory of the body and its constitutive rôle. Rather, we should turn to phenomenology and transcendental philosophy where the body is thematized, not in terms of matter taken to give rise to consciousness in an *empirical sense*, but rather in terms of the "lived body" that is taken, in a *transcendental sense*, to constitute the organization of meaning in our conscious and our unconscious psychological life. On the basis of an outline of this phenomenological theory, the author argues that Freud, most of all in his theory of psychosexual development, thematizes the body as *the form of the soul*.

Keywords: mind/body-problem; phenomenology; the transcendental body; psychosexual development; drive

In his introductory lectures of 1932, Freud defines psychoanalysis as "the science of the living soul" — *die Wissenschaft vom Seelenleben* (1932, p. 6). Toward the background of our inherited dichotomy between body and soul, this could easily lead to the assumption that Freudian psychoanalysis regards the human body as an unimportant field of study and takes it to be an irrelevant factor when it comes to understanding, generally, the constitution of our psychic life, and when it comes to interpreting, specifically, the etiology of psychic suffering. As we do know, this description is false. Not only has Freud a lot to say about the relation between body and soul, but he has also — which I hope the present paper will show — very important and interesting things to say about the deeper character of this relation.

According to Mark Solms and Oliver Turnbull — the leading representatives for the so-called neuropsychanalytic school — the relation between body and soul has troubled thinkers since ancient times. This is correct. However, it is not correct that this question always has had the form that Solms and Turnbull seem to suggest: "How does our immaterial consciousness — our very sense of existence and identity — emerge from the cell assemblies and other base processes of the brain" (2002, p. xiii).

To formulate the problem of the relation between body and soul in terms of how one should understand the relation between consciousness and the brain, or in terms of explaining how consciousness can arise out of matter

— usually referred to as "the mysterious leap" — is a modern and far from innocent tendency rooted in the scientific revolution of the 17th century. Later, where this perspective became prevalent, it instigated the whole spectrum of theories and answers suggested by the philosophy of mind of the so-called Analytic tradition during the 20th Century — a spectrum of theories ranging from "substance dualism" (the claim that consciousness is something distinctively non-physical, something whose identity is independent of any body with which the mind temporarily happens to be interrelated), via "identity theory" (the claim that all states of mind really are physical states in the brain), and all the way to "eliminative materialism" (the claim that all everyday, non-physicist descriptions of our consciousness will eventually get eliminated through the progress of natural science and hence readily replaced, without loss, by neurobiological descriptions).

During the last 5 decades, we have seen a number of attempts at incorporating Freud into this discussion about the relation between body and soul.¹ However, the contributions to this field of research have been highly contradictory. Freud has been portrayed, sometimes, as an outspoken dualist, sometimes as a strict materialist; and it has even been suggested that Freud himself started in one camp and ended up in the other, so that it all comes to depend on which period of Freud's works we focus on.

It is highly revealing that, in the attempts at placing Freud within this theoretical framework, the main

*Email: johan.erik@sh.se

references have been *Project for a scientific psychology* from 1895, where Freud tries to construct a psychology on the basis of neural interaction, together with certain passages in later works where Freud briefly abandons the psychoanalytic way of thinking in favour of general statements about the relation between the human psyche and the brain. For example: “all our provisional ideas in psychology will presumably some day be based on an organic substructure” (1914, p. 78); or: “Research has given irrefutable proof that mental activity is bound up with the function of the brain as it is with no other organ [...]; but every attempt to go on from there to discover a localization of mental processes, every endeavour to think of ideas as stored up in nerve-cells and of excitations as travelling along nerve-fibres, has miscarried completely” (1915b, p. 174).

What I perceive as revealing in the fact that theorists within this field have chosen to focus exclusively on such passages, is, of course, that they pay little attention to the parts of Freud’s theorizing where he is not only expressing himself in grammatical terms, but where he really thematizes, *psychoanalytically* as it were, the problem of the relation between body and soul. I think here primarily of the theory of drives and the theory of psychosexual development, and that these important theoretical traits have been absent from this specialized debate is thus, I think, because theorists have wanted to incorporate Freud in a discussion based on a certain way of perceiving the fundamental problem, one where it is formulated exclusively in terms of the relation between the consciousness and the brain. In that context, however, we must admit that Freud’s contribution is really quite scarce.

If we want to incorporate Freud’s way of dealing with the soul/body-problem into a modern philosophical discussion, it seems that Analytical philosophy of mind is not really what we are looking for. Rather, we should turn to the transcendental philosophy, the existence philosophy and the phenomenological philosophy of thinkers from the continental tradition such as Edmund Husserl, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty or Michel Henry. What fundamentally characterizes their way of dealing with the body/soul-problem is that they do not thematize the body as matter taken to give rise to consciousness in an *empirical sense*, but rather in terms of the “lived body” that is taken, in a *transcendental sense*, to constitute the organization of meaning in our conscious and our unconscious psychological life.

In what follows, I will first explore the philosophical roots of the tendency to equate the body/soul-relation with the relation between matter and mind. Then, in contrast, I will briefly sketch the principal traits of how the constitutive rôle of the lived body is understood within phenomenology and existential philosophy. What I hope to establish with this is a philosophical horizon against the background of which I will finally try to say something

about how Freud, most of all in his theory of psychosexual development, thematizes the body as *the form of the soul*.

Matter and mind

Today we live, to a large extent at least, in what could be called a naturalistic and scientific culture, a culture characterized by a worldview saying that everything that exists is *basically* of causally determined nature. Such things as emotions, thoughts, experiences, meaning and value are in this way reduced to a kind of “epiphenomena”, i.e., they tend to be seen as by-products or results of organic processes. Hence, natural science becomes the only way of gaining objective knowledge of the world, and the scientific *researcher* (rather than, e.g., the educated and discerning thinker) acquires the rôle of being the one who should, in a wider cultural context, not only describe and explain the world, but also the rôle of the arbiter when it comes to ontological questions about *what things really are*, e.g., “depression is *really* an imbalance between signal substances in the brain”.

The historical roots to this naturalistic and scientific culture can be found in the scientific revolution of the 17th century. What happens during that epoch has been characterized as a transgression from an Aristotelian or teleological worldview to a mechanical one. The world is no longer seen as organized on a moral, religious and metaphysical basis, but is rather seen as a universe of material bodies in motion, a system of empirical regularities with no inherent meaning or purpose. Changes in nature are no longer perceived as transitions from something potential to something actual according to a purpose. Instead, this model of explanation, henceforth ridiculed as “animistic”, is replaced by a modern one formulated in terms of pressure, force, impact and attraction — think, for example, of Newton’s laws of motion.

A decisive impetus to the establishment of this worldview was the introduction of the distinction between “primary” and “secondary” qualities — perhaps best formulated by Galilei in his *The assayer* from 1623. Primary qualities — such as form, size, weight and motion — are properties that belong to things irrespective of our experiences of them. That is, things would have these qualities, one thinks, even if there did not exist creatures who perceived the things in question. In this sense, primary qualities are taken to be “absolute”. The secondary qualities, on the other hand — such as smell, taste, colour, warmth — are qualities that we have a certain everyday tendency of ascribing to the things themselves, but that, when we look closer into the matter, are revealed as belonging merely to our own experiences of the things. The secondary qualities, thus, are really subjective effects, caused and explained by the primary qualities. In this sense, the secondary qualities are not absolute but rather “anthropocentric”.

As this distinction gains ground, as it manages to ontologically ascribe all secondary qualities to our own experiences, it comes to establish a general, categorial cleft between the world *as it really is* and the world *as we perceive it*. Hence, not only experiences such as smell, taste, etc., but also existential aspects such as meaning, value and purpose, are taken not to be part of the “*in itself*” of the world, and thus to have no part in *what really exists*. This worldview therefore also comes to instigate a certain epistemology built upon an ideal of objectivity: to think objectively about something means to describe and explain it as an object among other objects, i.e., to describe and explain it in terms that are independent of our experiences, terms that remain valid beyond or irrespective of our subjective experiences (cf. Taylor 1985, p. 46f). Reality is something thought to exist independently, beyond all our knowledge and experiences; and scientific objectivity means to reflect or represent this reality in a faithful way, *as it is in itself*.

This idea of objective knowledge also gives rise, to a certain scientific endeavour — the project of creating a manageable, scientific *method*, consisting of a number of “rules of conduct”, which aim is to master and to eliminate all distortion stemming from man’s “finitude”, i.e., to minimize the influence of the fact that we are bodily beings which always speak from a certain perspective, with a certain interest, within a certain conceptual context, from a certain social and historical position, etc. An absolute and strict methodological description of the world would then, ideally, be “dehumanized”, devoid of any traces of *whose* description it is, and on what type of experiences it was based. Such an absolute description of the world would be formulated, then, from what Thomas Nagel once famously coined as “the view from nowhere” (1986).

The “categorial cleft” created by the Scientific Revolution, together with the idea of an epistemological liberation from our own finitude and the possibility of formulating an absolute description or representation of the world — all this means that aspects such as our bodies, our language, our history and our cultural contexts, cannot be seen as *constitutive* aspects of human experience, as something that *gives our experiences their ground*, but are rather reduced to something that stands in the way of an ideally “neutral” contact between mind and world. Body, language, history and culture seem to be worldly “accidents” taking hold of consciousness from the outside, so to speak, while the essence of consciousness is really quite something else. The principal possibility to think rationally, to produce “undistorted”, objective knowledge of reality, seems to show that consciousness really is something incorporeal. (cf Taylor, 1995, p. 66).

In other words: it is within the context of the fundamental ontological and epistemological structures created by the Scientific Revolution that it becomes possible for

Descartes to formulate his famous dualism between spirit and nature, a dualism that has dominated Western Philosophy through the past four centuries: the world fundamentally consists of two altogether different and reciprocally independent types of things, “things with extension” (*res extensa*) and “thinking things” (*res cogitans*). In this framework, man seems to be the peculiar being that, as reason and body, has part in both the mechanistically determined universe of corporeal things and the spiritually free universe of thinking things. Man *is* his consciousness, his “inner”, and *has* his body as a functioning tool for his actions and expressions in the outer world, a tool that also delivers the sensory material out of which man creates all his spiritual “representations” of reality.

This distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* — or between “subject” and “object”, according to which the human body belongs exclusively to the universe of objects — gives rise not only to the classical, epistemological problems like how we can know with certainty anything about the outer world and how I can be certain that other people have an inner life when I can observe only their behavior, but also to the modern and ostensibly self-evident way of formulating the problem of the relation between body and soul. And here we see the limitation of the intellectual framework wherein substance dualism and eliminative materialism really are but two sides of the same coin: How can our immaterial souls interact with our material bodies? Are what we call mental activities really only physical processes in our brains? Could we not replace our everyday psychological language with neurobiological one? How can we understand the mysterious leap between consciousness and matter? Or if we go back to my initial quotation of Solms and Turnbull: “How does our immaterial consciousness — our very sense of existence and identity — emerge from the cell assemblies and other base processes of the brain”.

The transcendental body

Naturalism takes the only “real” sphere, the sphere of reality in its proper sense, to be the sphere of material bodies in motion. Its form of thinking thus strangely resembles Platonism, for which the only real sphere is the heavenly sphere of Ideas. In contrast to the world we experience on a daily basis, when we do not engage in scientific research, the world of natural science is, fundamentally, an *idealized* world, a world “beyond” or “transcending” the world we experience directly and with which we are familiar. There is, for example, an essential difference between how we experience nature when we are out in the forest looking for mushrooms and the way in which the same nature would be described in the mathematical language of modern physics, as a series of natural processes composed by quantitative moments such as motion, force, time, etc. The naturalistic world, as we have seen, is

perceived only when “dehumanized”, only when it is freed from every subjective perspective, freed from all the vagueness and relativity that permeate all our practical interactions with, and experiences of, the world.

What is expelled from the naturalistic worldview, thus, is precisely what has been termed “the life-world” within phenomenology and existential philosophy, i.e., the world of cultural, linguistic and meaningful experiences wherein we live our lives and by which we identify ourselves as well as our possibilities; the world wherein we will have the distinctive features which characterize ourselves as human beings, and wherein things get organized into a more-or-less well-ordered system of significations; i.e., the world wherein we can “lead” our lives on the basis of our own concerns, our convictions, our standpoints — that whole setting which endows with meaning, and thereby makes possible, such things as reasoning, judgment, responsibility and decision.

Another way of pinning down the disappearance of the life-world within the naturalistic worldview would be to criticize naturalism for a certain blindness when it comes to the subjective life of the human mind. What happens is that consciousness gets reduced to an object among other objects in the natural world; the psychological states gets reduced to a class of phenomena included within the larger class of worldly beings. Even where consciousness, as in Descartes, continues to be seen as a spiritual *res cogitans* rather than as a natural *res extensa*, it is still perceived of as a “thing” (*res*) that exhaustively can be investigated by the positive sciences from their characteristic third-person perspective, and in their search for objective facts about worldly beings.

This “naturalization of consciousness”, as Husserl calls it (cf. 1911), this psycho-physical parallelism, means that consciousness can never become visible or thematized in its capacity as something *to which* or *through which* the world is given to us. The subject is perceived exclusively as an “empirical subject”, a subject *in* the world, but never as a “transcendental subject”, a subject *for* the world (Husserl, 1934–1937, § 53). Consciousness as *intentionally* related to the world remains invisible; consciousness remains invisible as *the necessary, constitutive precondition* for the appearance of the world, the precondition in relation to which worldly beings are endowed with meaning and significance. In other words, naturalism eclipses any way of perceiving consciousness as the *opening up* of the world within which the positive sciences can find something to investigate!

Phenomenology and phenomenological existence philosophy can be seen, fundamentally, as reactions against and proposed correctives to this naturalization of consciousness. Whereas the positive sciences, including experimental psychology, seek empirical knowledge of worldly beings, including psychological states, the

phenomenological researcher instead descends into the life of intentional experiences, into the first-person perspective, and from there tries to clarify and to articulate the intentional structures and forms of experience that constitute the world as a *sphere of meaning*. What phenomenology wants to study, then, is *givenness*; its aim is to develop a *logos* about *phenomena*. And here I see an essential connection between phenomenology and psychoanalysis as it was created by Freud after he had abandoned his theory of seduction in 1897. At that time, Freud realized that an objective incident — a seduction or an attempt at seduction — can never provide the ultimate, causal ground of explanation in our attempts to understand the etiology of psychic suffering. Instead, the psychoanalyst must learn to listen to how the incident (real or imagined) has acquired its traumatic significance, and how this significance is constituted within a personal framework of conscious and unconscious motives, wishes, desires, ideas, defences, etc.

Resembling phenomenology and existential-phenomenological philosophy, psychoanalysis is thus not a theory about “the psychological” as a subgroup of “worldly beings”, but a theory about our life of experiences and *the constitution of its meaning* — “a science of the living soul”. And for this reason, I think phenomenology’s way of thematizing the body as the zero-point of this constitution of meaning may function, precisely, as a privileged starting point for a closer understanding of the rôle of the body within Freudian psychoanalysis.

The body is the foundation of the psyche — this statement is doubtlessly true, but it can mean different things and be true in different ways. Within the empirical sciences, it means, stated somewhat bluntly, that such things as thinking, perception, emotions and fantasies are causally dependent on the functioning of our brains. Within phenomenology, the statement means something else. The fact that we are bodily beings, i.e., the fact that we have bodies that are shaped in certain ways, that we have our own specific, physical needs, our own physical abilities and limitations, etc. — viz. the fact that we live as corporeal subjects and not as some ethereal beings without desires, unfettered by time and space — this fact organizes the very meaning and *form* of our world and of our lived experiences.

However, we must clarify here what we mean by “this fact”. The statement that we live as corporeal subjects — with all its different aspects — is not merely a declaration of a contingent, anthropological fact concerning the human form of life, a fact that we can discover empirically and that happens to be correlated with the organization of our experiential life. Rather, what we have here is an attempt at articulating *an experience of ourselves* in which we are always already living, an attempt at expressing an implicit understanding lingering in the background, so to speak; a “background awareness” or a

“background consciousness” within which our experiences are structured. The body, the “lived body” or the body as experienced from within — the body that *I am* rather than the body *I have*, the body that is never mentioned in biology books or shown on anatomical charts — is thus not an *object* of our psychological experiences, but is, on the contrary, *the foundation of the psyche itself*: a constitutive part of the “subjective side” of experience, in relation to which the “objective side” gains its character of having a certain meaning.

According to phenomenology’s way of thinking, thus, the body is constitutive, but not in an empirical, but rather in a *transcendental* sense. Kant, the creator of transcendental philosophy, realized that our epistemological relation to the world cannot be understood according to a model saying that knowledge consists of a faithful reflection or representation of an independent reality. Rather, our relation to the world is organized in accordance with our “forms of intuition” and our “categories of understanding” that become *a priori* preconditions for all empirical knowledge. And similarly, within phenomenology, philosophers have expanded upon Kant’s epistemological project, realizing that our pre-reflexive background experience of ourselves as corporeal subjects, corporeal first-person perspectives (along with our background experience of living in an intersubjective community with a language, a history and so on), is constitutive for the way in which the world appears and is presented to us: our background experience of being corporeal subjects lets the world be seen, experienced and understood as the world it is.

For example: were it not for the fact that I, in my perception of the world, am unable to be everywhere at once, but instead always experiencing myself as localized in a particular place and at a particular time — i.e. were it not for the fact that we constantly experience ourselves as corporeal subjects with the principal possibility of moving and acting in space — then the perceived world would lack the reference point around which it can be organized in terms of things being present or absent, being tall or short, being above or below, being in the background or the foreground, etc. If we were ethereal beings, if we had the ability to be everywhere at once, then the things within space-time could never exist independently, they would be deprived of the very possibility of existing “in themselves”, for the simple reason that the meaning of this “in themselves” implies that we can make a distinction between the appearance of things and their being; and this distinction, in its turn, implies that the things cannot appear to us in their totality, from all sides at the same time, but only in a specific profile from out of a bodily situated perspective.

Furthermore, we are able to realize that not only the perceived world, but also the lived world of practical concerns, has as its precondition our own experience of

ourselves as corporeal subjects. A hammer, for example, acquires its character of being a hammer (and not only by being a thing with extension in space) by being part of a context of practical possibilities, possibilities that again reflect our bodily abilities and limitations. Were it not for our background awareness of these abilities and limitations, we would be unable to ascribe such properties to things as being functional, out of reach, more-or-less apt to their purpose, too heavy, being in the way, dangerous, threatening, etc. We would also lose the foundation for making conceptual distinctions such as between wishing and getting, or desiring, wanting and achieving, etc. Hence, to describe our world and our experience in these terms and on the basis of these distinctions gets meaningful only against the background of our experience of ourselves as bodily beings, and therefore, as I said above, this experience is constitutive — in a transcendental sense.

All this said, it is finally time to approach our central concern: the meaning of the body in Freud’s psychoanalysis.

The form of the soul

If Freudian psychoanalysis is a theory about our lived experiences and their organization or constitution of meaning, a science of the living soul, then I take as its essential contribution in relation to phenomenology, and to transcendental philosophy in general, to be its higher degree of sensitivity to the anomalies of our lived experiences, *viz.* its readiness to take into account the fact that the intentional life is something fragile, vulnerable and multi-determined; something whose development has a history which is not regulated by laws but is rather determined by how well the psyche succeeds in handling the constant challenges posed to it by the ongoing development. This pertains not least to the way Freudian psychoanalysis understands the organization of the psyche as developing in relation to the body and its drives.

At the moment when we are born and leave the womb, and are confronted by unsatisfied needs for the first time, we are no more than sensitive bodies governed by instincts and reflexive impulses — the cold, the hunger and the pain provoke the screaming and the tears. At this stage, Freud thinks, no psychic life has begun to exist. As our needs are then fulfilled in the caring interaction with the primary objects, he goes on, a gradual transgression takes place from what we here might call the “functional” towards the “libidinous” register. The repeated procedure of breast-feeding, the prototypical caring interaction, satisfies not only the infant’s bodily instincts, the biological need for nourishment, along with it also comes the lustful *experiences* of the stimulation of the lips and the mouth at the sucking of the nipple and the taste of the warm milk (Freud, 1905, p. 182). The concept of “experience” is fundamental in this context: the infant does not yet

experience “hunger” or “being full” (these categories are too sophisticated at this stage), but is able to experience what Freud tries to articulate in terms of “lust” and “excitation”, “pleasure” and “un-pleasure”. This goes to show that the infant’s first experiences are of a “sexual” character, and that the first site of pleasure and un-pleasure, the first “erogenous zone”, is of course the mouth and the lips.

Furthermore, Freud thinks that this experience of sexual pleasure establishes “memory traces” (something that only an experience can do) that, as soon as the bodily excitation again provokes attention, will trigger a yearning to re-experience the same situation where the satisfaction was first felt. Here, in the dialectical interaction between excitation, care, pleasure and memory, arises the infantile, sexual drive, i.e., “the psychical representative of an endosomatic, continuously flowing source of stimulation” (*ibid*, p.168). Now, we find ourselves within the libidinous register where our bodily instincts and needs — those quantitative occurrences of the physical world that can be fully described from a third-person perspective — acquire the character of motivational forces with their own directions and points of orientation within an archaic and, on a basic level, temporally structured world of experiences. In Freud’s theory, we learn that the drive has a source, a pressure, an aim and an object (cf 1915a, p. 122), and here all these concepts are to be understood as *articulative* rather than objective concepts. They should be read as a series of attempts to reconstruct, systematize and theoretically express, as it were from within, the fleeting energetic forms of our developing intentional life, these forms in relation to which the world acquires its character of being something that *concerns us*, something that is *cathected*, something that has *meaning*. To grow into the libidinous register thus means to move from being a mere biological entity reacting on inner and outer stimuli, to becoming a corporeal psyche that must begin to *deal* with a world and with its way of being in the world.

The life of our drives, it may be said, is what anchor us in the world. The drives establish a kind of pre-subjective or pre-personal bodily “pact” with the world, a sphere of energetic concerns and expressions that initially delineate the fundamental, intentional forms that serve as framework for the gradual development of what we call personality, character or subjectivity. The infantile desires, sensitivities, projects, possibilities and limitations of the experienced and experiencing body offer a distinct kind of contact with the world, a contact that will establish the first “categories” in accordance with which the world gets understood. Put briefly, the infantile, sexual body is not primarily an object in the world but rather is the *opening* of the world.

Freud’s theory of psychosexual development is therefore not only a theory about the organisational and historical development of our drives, but also a theory of the development of the world, or to use Heidegger’s well-

known neologism: the historical development of our being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1927). This, I think, is what Freud ultimately intends in his later, structural terminology, by proposing that the ego first and foremost has the character of a “bodily ego” (1923, p. 26). For if the fully developed ego, according to Freud’s own theories, is “the organized portion of the id” (1926, p. 97) — i.e., the part of the id that stands in contact with the structures, limitations and demands of external reality, and that thereby becomes able to fulfil its rôle of creating a kind of equilibrium between the different aspects of our psychic lives — if the fully developed ego is taken to have this character, then the bodily ego must designate the primary, rudimentary organisation of the world accomplished by our drives.

Our first contact with the world is, as has already been noted, of an oral character. The world is initially organized, and concerns us, not in terms of what can still our hunger, and definitely not in terms of what is good to us, but exclusively in terms of what can and cannot give us oral pleasure — first of all: what can and cannot be incorporated through the mouth. And furthermore, Freud, as is also well-known, claims, in his somewhat schematic description of our psychosexual development, that this phase is replaced by, or rather expanded through, the “anal” or “anal-sadistic” phase. As is implied by the name, this phase is characterized by the fact that the anal zone becomes the principal site of sexual pleasure. The first bodily function that the child is able to control is the release of excrement by way of the rectal musculature. This gives rise to a possibility of anal masturbation: by withholding excrement till the point where it causes violent muscular contractions, it can, when it is finally admitted passage through the anus, cause a sexual stimulation of the mucuous membrane (Freud, 1905, p. 186). In this way, the categorial organization of the world can be expanded and the world can now begin to concern us, not only in terms of what can be incorporated or not, but also in terms of activity and passivity, what can and what cannot be controlled, power and powerlessness, inside and outside. Also the excrements themselves are here invested with meaning: the faeces can become a gift that the child gives to its parents during potty training in order to fulfil their wishes, or it can become something that the child refuses to give away in order to torture its milieu.

Then, at the beginning of the phallic phase — when the genitals become the privileged, erogenous zone but when the distinction between two, complimentary sexes is not yet realized by the child — such categorial distinctions as those between having and lacking, presence and absence, losing or gaining, being perfect or wanting, may arise. These structural and constitutive forms of experience then serve as foundation for the generation of the Oedipus-complex and for the fear of castration which, eventually, in the ideal case, will mean the dissolution of

the Oedipus-complex and thereby entry into the genital order. Here, in the genital phase, are finally established the fundamental distinctions that characterize a world and a psychic life sorting under what Freud calls “the reality principle”: the distinction between two, complimentary sexes, between generations, between subject and object, between fantasy and reality, between life and death, etc. Briefly stated: through the establishment of genital sexuality, the individual enters into the world of adults; she leaves behind the auto-erotic omnipotence of infantile narcissism and starts to organize her own identity, her world, her emotions, hopes and projects on the basis of a realization of her own “finitude”, on all of its different levels.

If the theory of psychosexual development briefly sketched in the above passage was nothing but an attempt at specifying the somatic sources of sexual excitation during different phases of childhood, or at specifying certain traits of masturbatory behaviour that we are able to verify or falsify by way of empirical research, then what we have here would be a naturalistic theory in line with the thematizations of the body proposed by experimental psychology or by neurobiology. But Freud’s theory, rather than being merely a theory of sexual development, is also a theory about *psycho*-sexual development. And it is this basic feature that makes it able to become a conceptual fundament for psychoanalysis as a science about the soul, for its way of understanding the constitution of our psychic life in general, and for its way of explaining the etiology of psychic suffering in particular.

The world fully organized in a genital sense — this of course is a psychoanalytical ideal, an ethic conceptualization or a normative point of reference for how we are to visualize psychological health and a good life. In reality, infantile sexuality and its different phases continue to resound in the unconscious by way of unintegrated wishes, impulses and prototypical attitudes that are expressed, more-or-less covertly, in the adult world. This becomes obvious not least in psychoanalytic practice, which essentially provokes regressive strategies of the analysand. An analysand of oral character may tend, for example, to establish a primitive identification with the analyst by “devouring” the latter’s interpretations as though they were milk and honey. An analysand of anal character may feel a compulsion to try to control the analytic dialogue by constantly trying to anticipate the analyst’s interpretations. Or, again, an analysand that has phallic issues may experience an intimidating fear of castration as he does not possess the knowledge that the analyst expresses through his interpretations.

These examples demonstrate how Freud perceives the whole arsenal of what he calls psychological defence mechanisms as genealogically grounded in our psychosexual development. Defence mechanisms can either be expressions of fixated patterns and approaches in the

developed character, or they can be potential and primitive ways of dealing with life that we can regress back to under difficult circumstances. To borrow one of Freud’s famous examples (1917): at the loss of a loved object, a person with a depressive disposition is often unable to enter into a normal or “genital” process of grief, but rather has a tendency to regress to an oral approach and, in the form of an unconscious fantasy, incorporate the lost object and thus turning it into a part of his own ego, and this in order to give himself the possibility of a violent self-criticism that is really about expressing the forbidden, infantile rage provoked by the lost object.

Defence mechanisms such as repression, projection, introjection, isolation, splitting, and so on, thus represent different, regressive ways of treating psychological phenomena as though they were corporeal, as if it were possible to manipulate and to control emotions, impulses and fantasies as though they were food or excrement. And here, it should be pointed out that the very belief in this possibility is necessary for the *effectiveness* of the defence mechanisms (cf. Wollheim, 1982). The defence mechanisms really are unconscious *fantasies*, and these fantasies would not be effective — they would not possess “psychic reality”, they would have no real impact on my emotions, experiences or attitudes — if it were not for fact that they are rooted in an implicit experience of the self and of the world, one to which the adult psyche can regress, and one which has to be structured according to bodily forms.

Freud’s theory about psychosexual development would remain thoroughly unable to explain these things were it a naturalistic theory aimed at pointing bodily functions, somatic sources of pleasure, or masturbatory behavioural patterns during childhood, etc. Instead, the theory of psychosexual development provides us with a theoretical articulation and systematization of the “organ language” in which the psyche originally tends to express and to understand itself, an organ language that gives structure, both cognitively and emotionally, to our unconscious life. And this also enables the theory of psychosexual development to become, ultimately, an integral part of the “listening instrument” that the psychoanalyst uses to become keenly aware of the infantile layers that may lie in ambush behind the thoughts, emotional reactions and relational patterns of the adult world. And, finally, once we have started to acknowledge the constitutive organ language of our psychic life, we no longer need, as in the philosophy of mind of the Analytic tradition, to conceive the relation between body and soul as a “mysterious leap” between mind and matter. And neither do we need to — as Freud still did at that time when he had not yet discovered the archaic, psychological life — explain the bodily expressions of psychological conflicts in terms of a “conversion” (cf. Lear, 1990, p. 39f). We simply do not need to imagine any “leaps” from bodily processes to those going on in the soul, nor do we need to stipulate any

“conversions” in the opposite direction. Rather, as we have come to realize: the body is the form of the soul!

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Note

1. For a brief outline of this discussion, see Livingstone-Smith (2003).

Notes on contributor

Johan Eriksson. PhD in Philosophy. Candidate in the Swedish Psychoanalytic Association.

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