

FREEDOM AND THE UNCONSCIOUS IN MARITAIN'S *EXISTENCE AND THE EXISTENT*

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Maritain's *Existence and the Existent* contributes to the development of Thomist philosophical anthropology. Existentialist thought, with which Maritain's book is concerned, has offered a philosophy of human existence as a deliberate alternative to pictures of man drawn from the tradition of psychoanalysis. Maritain's anthropology mediates between these alternatives, harmonizing truths championed by both sides.

The way we understand the interrelationship between human freedom and the unconscious, or decide what and even whether these exist, is certainly related to metaphysics. Freud taught us to recognize the existence of unconscious personal depths, and to seek the freedom resulting from releasing the hold of buried contents through appropriating them in consciousness. Freud's own philosophical understanding, however, coming out of nineteenth century materialism, tends to lose sight of the higher ranges of human response and, identifying being with essence, tends to reduce free will to a reasonableness still subject to the determinisms of sub-personal reality.

Sartre teaches that we are always choosing, and that our very self-consciousness entails a transcendence of any mechanistic determinisms. But Sartre also reduces being to essence, with the result that "I" must be identified as non-being, a fleeting nothingness who must reject any connection, positive or negative, with supposed unconscious depths of the "self". As a result the Sartrean position comes dangerously close to equating freedom with the naive spontaneity of inadvertence.

Maritain's understanding of essence-existence, applied to the person, can provide the Freudian insight with a more nuanced account of the unconscious and its integration with the fully personal dimension, accept Sartre's free will while distinguishing it from superficially conscious random behavior, and provide the basis for a positive dialectic of freedom and the unconscious.

FREUD

In the context of the concerns of this paper, Freud must be credited with two great contributions.

First, he struck a most serious blow at Cartesianism by showing empirically that the human individual is so much more than a pure consciousness or a dualistic construction of consciousness plus a body. Levels and levels of motivation, response, and memory mediate between the pinpoint of present consciousness and some purely automatic *res extensa*. And psychosomatic medicine, a direct descendent of psychoanalysis, shows that the lived body is so much more than a Cartesian machine.¹

Second, Freud showed that psychic wholeness has a lot to do with the subject's ability to be "in touch" with these deeper levels, and that the healing of psychic disorder is related to "knowing" these contents, not just objectively, but in the sense of "working them through" and genuinely experiencing them as one's own, through a knowledge, as Thomists say, "by connaturality." As a philosopher, Freud always remains bound by an inadequate and crudely reductivist conceptual scheme. Long after abandoning the neurological model of the earlier period, Freud still thinks of the unconscious along mechanistic lines: it is a hidden machine full of strange "parts": repressed memories and subterranean drives. The behaviour of the individual is in principle explainable without remainder by reference to the determinism of this machine. Thus the mature Freud speaks of "the thoroughgoing meaningfulness and determinism of even the apparently most obscure and arbitrary mental phenomena."²

This mechanistic model works, to a point. The idea of a conservation of emotional tension, analogous to the conservation of energy in physics, under which fixed quantities of tension must be redirected when repressed, turns out to be very useful. The model explains the relief of neurotic symptom following upon the resuscitation of memories or the identification of wishes connected with drives. The memories and the wishes are seen to have been operative all along in the causation of behavior. In actual practice we see the patient released from this determinism into a capability to respond more freely to Being, though Freud would not put it that way.

That is exactly the problem. The whole battery of Freudian therapeutic concepts--sublimation, the transference, the stages of development, etc.--is oriented toward and productive of psychological wholeness and freedom for individuals. But when Freud speaks philosophically he offers a model which tends to reduce the person to a play of forces thereby losing the phenomenological unity of the person instead of explaining it. For Freud the person is, we might say, all essence and no existence, meaning that the unity of the act of existing is missing from view; what is left is sheer quiddity, capable of analysis without remainder into smaller "parts". Due to its determinism the model cannot account for the difference between the freedom of the "cured" and the unfreedom of the sick; due to its reductivism

the model cannot do full justice to its own insights: sublimation, for example, must be viewed cynically. One suspects that the effectiveness of therapeutic practice is itself blunted where that practice is restrained by a limiting materialism, and that the best practitioners of the method are those who free themselves from that philosophy.

SARTRE

Sartre's philosophy offers one dramatic possibility of dealing with the reductivism of modern positivism and materialism. In one of his bold strokes Sartre rejects the unconscious entirely. Lucid Cartesian consciousness in its self-reflective being-ahead-of-itself becomes the seat of man's ineluctable freedom. Freedom consists in the disavowal of the definite, the flight from determinateness which is the very essence of consciousness. Therefore there is no constitutive individual essence, let alone an unconscious. Consciousness throws itself in any direction it chooses.

Though Sartre does not want to speak of free *will*, we may, following normal usage, call this a doctrine of free will. Everyone possesses it, he says, to an equal degree. Then, if we want to distinguish some doctrine of *freedom* (as distinct from free will) in Sartre's writings, thinking of freedom as something possessed in varying degrees, freedom could be identified as "authenticity," that is, minimal bad faith, the relatively non-self-deceptive use of a free will which is always in operation and which is completely self-determinative.

Of course Sartre must admit the existence of self-deception but he claims that its analysis is not facilitated by the Freudian model. On the one hand, needing analysis are many cases of "bad faith" which do not fit the Freudian model; on the other hand there is no difference in principle between Freudian examples and other types of "bad faith". Sartre quotes with approval a Viennese psychiatrist, Stecke: "every time that I have been able to carry my investigations far enough, I have established that the crux of the psychosis is conscious".³ To maintain that the patient "really does not know" he is blocking or whatever goes contrary to the precisely what is most interesting about psychoanalysis; why, for example, does the patient resist as the psychoanalyst approaches the sore spot? We keep having to say he both knows and does not know. It is no help to posit a censor standing between the conscious ego and the unconscious depths, for "how could the censor discern the impulses needing to be repressed without being conscious of discerning them?"⁴

Sartre provides an alternative account of the very same phenomena Freud tried to explain, but based on the given non-coincidence with itself of self-reflective consciousness. The For-itself, since it *is* only by being not-itself, may choose to identify itself with what it recognizes in itself (in what it "has been"); this is "sincerity" and "good faith". Or it may choose to identify itself with something else, with what it wishes to be or whatever;

this is bad faith. Of course the first "slides" into the second because in both cases there is the self-deceptive reification of the self. Authenticity, he tells us, is something else again.

We are faced once more with the problem of the unity of the person. For Sartre "I" am nothing more than a flash of consciousness continually fleeing everything static, sluggish and lumpy, and fleeing it by objectifying it. "I" am rooted in nothing long-term, continuous, or given. Insofar as I am conscious I have no self; "The For-itself" he writes, "cannot have a 'profound self'.⁵ It would seem to follow that there is no distinction between a decision that is genuinely in line with who I really am and one that is "off the wall." This picture of the person, if it can be said to be that, is phenomenologically inform.

Sartre is to be praised all the same for his defense of free will: the person makes himself through his actions. The only trouble is that in Sartre's view there isn't any self to which these decisions contribute. (This view also boasts the convenience that there isn't any self to destroy nor any person when we're all finished, except a trajectory of decisions objectified from the outside.

Thus, if in Freud essence without existence collapsed into atomism, here existence without essence is the existence of nothing. If for Freud freedom dissolved into determinism, here freedom degenerates into flight; if in Freud the "I" disappears from view, in Sartre the "I" is reduced to spasms of Cartesian transparency understood as acts of nihilation.

MARITAIN

To begin with, Maritain recognizes the unconscious, as we know from *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*.

The notion of the psychological unconscious was made into a self-contradictory enigma by Descartes, who defined the soul by the very act of self-consciousness. Thus we must be grateful to Freud and his predecessors for having obliged philosophers to acknowledge the existence of unconscious thought and unconscious psychological activity.

Before Descartes, the human soul was considered a substantial reality accessible only to metaphysical analysis, a spiritual entelechy informing the living body, and distinct from its own operations; and this, of course, made a completely different picture. The Schoolmen were not interested in working out any theory about unconscious life of the soul, yet their doctrines implied its existence.⁶

It is just the failure to recognize these depths which constitutes the error of so much existentialist thought:

. . . for the unthinkable notion of a subject without a nature there is substituted the notion of pure action or pure efficiency as the exercise of an option--of pure liberty, in short, itself ambiguous and collapsing from within; for although it seems to appeal to a sovereign free will, it really appeals only to pure spontaneity, which is inevitably suspected of being merely the sudden explosion of necessities hidden in the depths of that nature which was allegedly exorcised.⁷

Maritain cites with approval the existentialists' appreciation of liberty as an "essential transcendence with regard to the specifications and virtualities of essence, though they be those of the 'profound self'."⁸ That is to say, Maritain would substitute "Existence transcends essence" for Sartre's "Existence precedes essence".

For Maritain, there is genuine free will which, plunged into action and truly attentive to its exigencies, loosens the hold of lower determinisms and integrates their otherwise blind origins. The depths of the person, which can never be entirely plumbed by the consciousness of the individual to whom they belong, come into play as supports and guarantees of the truly free act. The free act is always transcending, going beyond the "given" of individual essence.

But Maritain gives the apparent inexplicability of some of the freest, most creative decisions an explanation differing from those of the Boulevard St. Germain's: ". . . the judgment of the subject's conscience is obliged, at the moment when judgment is freely made, *to take account also of the whole of the unknown reality within him--his secret capacities, his deeply rooted aspirations, the strength or frailty of his moral stuff, his virtues (if he has any), the mysterious call of his destiny*".⁹

As we know from his work on aesthetics, Maritain distinguishes between two specifically different unconsciousnesses (a distinction not to be confused with Jung's collective vs. personal unconscious, though it is compatible with it, he tells us). According to Maritain there is a spiritual unconscious distinct from the Freudian "thought in vital intercommunication and interaction with it".¹⁰

Reason does not only consist of its conscious logical tools and manifestations, nor does the will consist only of its deliberate conscious determinations. Far beneath the sunlit surface thronged with explicit concepts and judgments, words and expressed resolutions or movements of the will, are the sources of knowledge and creativity, of love and suprasensuous desires, hidden in the primordial translucent

night of the intimate vitality of the soul. Thus it is that we must recognize the existence of an unconscious or preconscious which pertains to the spiritual powers of the human soul and to the inner abyss of personal freedom, and of the personal thirst and the striving for knowing and seeing, grasping and expressing: a spiritual or musical unconscious which is specifically different from the automatic or dead unconscious.¹¹

Thus, for Maritain, a free decision is not a mere nihilation: it is somehow responsive and responsible to a given nature whose constitution includes subconscious and unconscious contents.

ONTOLOGY

The difficulty, we have said, is attaining a correct ontological analysis. Freud is not trying to give us one, in the way that philosophers do, but Sartre is. Now Sartre sees consciousness as an escape from being, which he equates with essence, into the openness of non-being, existence. From this point of view a rock is more self-identical than a person. But from a Thomistic point of view this is backwards. The Thomist (with the physicists) would say that beneath the apparent self-identity of the rock is a Heraclitean flux wherein the stability is really a repetitious present. We must simplify to speak of essence in this tide of becoming.

Far from being a loss of stability and self-identity, a personal consciousness is a significant advance along the line of overcoming diversity, a continual knitting-together, of what would otherwise be lost with an ever-fresh response, what a more Augustinian tradition would call *memory*. It is not, as Sartre would have it, that solid being is now cracked open irreparably; rather it is that, proceeding up the hierarchy of being, we're at last hitting something with some real density. The human person represents a higher degree of being, in terms of both existence and essence, than mere biological life, which in its turn represents a great ontological ascendancy over the inorganic. But here at the human level existence finally achieves a true transcendence over temporal disintegration; essence takes on full distinctness.

But human self-identity is never complete. For one thing we are continually forging our identity through free acts in a process which is complete only at death. In addition, our materiality means precisely a continual abandonment of the inner for the outer, a continual stream through the senses of what cannot be completely digested, and therefore a continual need to bring the inner, with all its sediments and layers into relation with the outer. An angel, who has no body, does not have this sort of problem nor this sort of adventure.

For Maritain a person is the fullest example within the visible world of an individual substance. A form is individuated such that every bit of matter

in the entire live being shares in the individuation. Conversely, the soul, the rational form extends down to the toes, as it were, and so is a lot more than consciousness. And here there is *essence and existence*, an existence which is always the existence of an essence, and an essence which exists in this free self-determining fashion of human personhood.

We have seen that for Maritain there is a human essence, both specific and individual, and that one important feature of a free decision is that it regards, gives attention to, this "given" which is a part of the self. But these depths of the person are "unknown to him in terms of reason" and grasped through a "dim instinct he possesses of himself." Now Maritain says:

"Self-knowledge as a mere psychological analysis of phenomena more or less superficial, a wandering through images and memories, is but an egoistic awareness, *however valuable it may be*. . . . The spiritual existence of love is the supreme revelation of existence for the Self.¹²

For Maritain, liberty is found in the choices where I am revealed to myself in the face of the other who draws from me my most hidden eros; my possibilities of attraction and self-determination in commitment are revealed to me simultaneously as I open myself to the love of the other.

This is what is really distinctive about Maritain's vision. The reality of attraction to the good is the key; here I am solicited by that which, genuinely outside myself, beckons to me and challenges me to rise in response with my whole self, to become one with my self in recall and commitment. It is only here that I cease to exist merely as this individual, full of interesting possibilities, and enter the domain of truly personal life.

But the question remains: What place is there for seeking to re-experience (with Freud) or to experience (with Jung) my depths? As regards Maritain's quotation, just how valuable is it, this wanderring through images and memories for the individual on the way to fully personal existence? Does Maritain's scant treatment of these matters reflect a failure to distinguish carefully conceptual knowledge here from the knowledge by connaturality which the psychologist actually aims at for the patient? Karol Wojtyla, within a careful and faithfully Aristotelian description, urges bringing unconscious contents to consciousness.¹³

PSYCHOLOGICAL PRACTICE

Some suggestions for therapeutic practice emerge.

1. The unconscious is not sealed off dualistically from a conscious upper storey. There is a gradation. Certainly there are seriously hidden traumatic memories as well as animal level drives; there is also the permeation of the rational soul, receptive to being and its meanings, into all levels of vegetative, animal, and emotive being. This corresponds with the target of Jungian therapy.
2. The self can never be known completely, either

objectively or subjectively. Not only can I not know its "contents" completely; I cannot, as Sartre would teach, know my freedom. It is not in any way a "content" yet it is the most important aspect of my subjectivity.

Two consequences follow:

(1) Therapy must know its limitations.

(2) There must be appeals to freedom. Approaches like Transactional Analysis are a good supplement here. T. A. heads for the objective cognizance of an "unconscious" (in the ordinary sense) motive or pattern ("script", etc.) and then appeal to free will: "Change it!"

3. The Thomist view of the self--the soul is the form of the body--means that the unconscious regions are not located somewhere else. Thus "the body knows." (T.A. speaks of "cellular memory".) Classical therapy leaves the body on the couch but, if the body knows, it will know both the twists and the positive potentials. Therapy must reflect this in its explorations, as well as in attempting to affect the soul through the body (relating to earth, to animals, dance, etc.).

4. Re-experiencing painful memories, knowing my motives, getting in touch with my most creative energies, I-Thou appeals to my freedom--none of these are yet enough. The psychological level has to give over at some point to the problem of the objective confrontation with the attractive, the valuable, what is *other* than the self. The role of the properly spiritual, the religious dimension, is to chart a course and provide a living context--both ideational and situational--for the personal Eros.

In short, for Maritain, and perhaps a little beyond Maritain, existence and essence go together; subconscious regions exist together with the lucid spearhead of consciousness in a polar unity; freedom consists in the establishment of inner unity through the habitual option for the good with firmness of commitment, and the attunement of superficial decision with the subject's more hidden propensities awakened and called forth in love.

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NOTES

1. Karl Stern, *The Third Revolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1954) p. 161.
2. Quoted in A. C. MacIntyre, *The Unconscious* (New York: Humanities Press, 1958) p. 90.
3. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956) p. 54.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 444.
6. Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (Princeton, 1977) pp. 95-96.
7. Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, trans. Lewis Galantiere and Gerald B. Pehlan (New York, 1956) p. 17.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
10. *Creative Intuition*, p. 106.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
12. *Existence and the Existent*, pp. 89-90.
13. Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person* (Boston, 1979), p. 95.