

It is right here and right now that we must ask: is our knowledge about to commence or already at its end?

The question is not as straightforward as it appears. The issue is whether HERE — right *here* where we are right now, at the intersection of sensation and the conscious act, at the imbrication of the mental series into physical ‘reality’— are we at the beginning of what we know, or at the end? Is *this* all we know, or just an overture?

A delightful antimony— after all, this *is* the end of our knowledge, since we certainly cannot know what we cannot also (at least) think, feel or experience. Yet, this is *also* the beginning of knowledge, as the spark which catches our imagination and causes a shift in our perspective; only *through* this shift do we come to knowledge at all, which is still confined strictly within the limits of the paranoid: what seems obvious is the identity, the connection, the fundamental ‘wholeness’ of the body and the mind. Yet this ‘certainty’ is ruptured by an even more ‘fundamental’ certainty of disjunction—for the body is NOT the same as ‘consciousness,’ even if the two are in more intimate proximity than any other entities in the universe, this proximity is not physical, not empirically measurable. As we trace a sensation through perception, imagination and memory, we trace not only its distortions and translations but its transfiguration and transubstantiation; the idea is not the word is not the thing, even though their formal content may appear identical throughout, the primary bearer of meaning is modulated and demodulated. So today we’re going to examine this circuit of consciousness and see whether or not we can resolve the question— is our knowledge already terminated or just being born?

So the question is in a sense about action, what aspects of the self must be involved, what we must have in order to say: “this constitutes a conscious act.” In answering this, are we at the beginning of what we know, or at the end? What seems obvious is the separation (mind/body); what seems obvious is the strict identity (mind-body.) At this level where it is possible to sensefully say both division and unity reign, we are caught in an epistemological circularity which allows us to assert knowledge on the basis of an irreducible gap. Our desire is to avoid ‘nothingness’; this vacuity causes anxiety, uneasiness. We fervently wish to complete the blank: _____. Filling in the hole is desire, a fantasy that the subject can be ‘reconstituted’ as an unfracture whole.

Now, we simply cannot speak meaningfully of the subject’s existence as a singularity or as a plurality; we must recognize the fundamental inconsistency, imbalance and rupture at the basis of identification. So we cannot posit either division or unity as the origin of subjectivity—the ontological categories don’t fit the phenomenological factum (qualia are neither rational nor irrational, but non-rational; they are felt, not known.) Axioms represent the assertion of knowledge at this pivotal crux, which is (as we have seen) an irreducible rupture, the subject’s non-identity with herself. Since as such the ego does not coincide with the subject, the ‘I’ cannot correspond precisely to the mind or the body. Yet the mental and physical series are inextricably interwoven, as a complex tapestry; the question is not: whether there is a mind-body dualism, or monism, or some kind of inconsistent multiplicity— but what such a theoretical position would even amount to structurally: how consciousness exists. How is this ex-centric subject/ego rupture produced and maintained?

In order to see if a solution lurks upon the surface, we look at Freud's paper *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*:

“In consequence of the pre-established connection between sense perception and muscular action, the ego has voluntary movement at its command. It has the task of self-preservation. As regards *external* events, it performs that task by becoming aware of stimuli, by storing up experience (in the memory), by avoiding excessively strong stimuli (through flight), by dealing with moderate stimuli (through adaptation) and finally by learning to bring about expedient changes in the external world to its own advantage (through activity.) As regards *internal* events, in relation to the id, it performs that task by gaining control over the demands of the instincts, by deciding whether they are to be allowed satisfaction, by postponing that satisfaction to times and circumstances favorable in the external world or by suppressing their excitations entirely. It is guided in its activity by consideration of the tensions produced by stimuli whether these tensions are present in it or introduced into it. The raising of these tensions is in general felt as unpleasure and their lowering as pleasure.”

I like what he's working with here. If you read carefully, it's almost a force-based model. Tensions arise in the gap or struggle between the inside and outside, produced by *stimulation* whether the tension is present in the ego or introduced into it. These tensions guide the activity of the ego: should we not already say push and pull with the pressure of seeking marginal pleasure increases?

“...The ego strives after pleasure and seeks to avoid unpleasure. An increase in unpleasure that is expected and foreseen is met by a signal of anxiety; the occasion of such an increase, whether it threatens from without or within, is known as danger.”

So the ego, unless it is asleep, is engaged, connected with the external world, pulled along by the tension/distension of pleasure-forces. “Tension” seems to be an aggregate. Now since pleasure is not uniformly distributed, we're not getting pulled equally in all directions (in which case there's a net force of zero) but this is not the case: we're always imbalanced, drawn unevenly and asymmetrically towards and away these tension-filled gaps between reality and desire. At the surface, we're pulled outwards by the Other who is deeper inside the liquid, flowing external reality. The ego is drawn to pleasure and is intensely attracted to this surface tension with which we easily identify, the ordinary confusion of reality with an appearance of generic depth. Yet this “surface” tension is always a perceived need, a lack of relaxation, a deficiency of release—but only lacking, needed because it is expected (in the way dissonance can lead to consonance.)

Freud continues: “The long period of childhood, during which the growing human being lives in dependence on his parents, leaves behind it as a precipitate the formation in his ego of a special agency in which this parental influence is prolonged.”

Here of course we're talking about the super-ego, which attempts to reconcile the demands between the id and of reality. The super-ego as a “precipitate” seems at first glance to bear out a chemical meaning, i.e., the solid formed in a solution during a reaction; the reaction in question seems to be a supersaturation of authority, which “chemically” changes the disciplined body, compounds the complexity of interaction and leaves behind a symbolic residue of cultural

normativity. The super-ego is shitted out of the reaction as the excrement of the oedipal relation; the obscene call sinks to the bottom where it screams to be obeyed, commands us to believe, controls and supervises our enjoyment. The tension between the pleasure principle and the reality principle is never wholly resolved and indeed the amount of tension, the amount of displacement is not the absolute amount of displacement from the position of the subject—which is nowhere, an empty square—the tension which is felt is not an absolute displacement, but “something in the rhythm of the changes” (as Freud puts it) since the true distance from you to yourself doesn’t exist. The two never coincide: me/my reality, super-ego/ego, ego/id; all these antagonisms are only fictionally united out of a desire for wholeness. Immediately after naming the ego as the pleasure principle (“The ego strives after pleasure and seeks to avoid unpleasure”) Freud speaks of anxiety, of the knowledge of danger. Isn’t all knowledge dangerous in this sense, founded upon nothing but subjectivity, uncertain, paranoid? But anxiety is not known directly, only through a symbol-signal; what is felt (and not known) is the tension, between the reality/pleasure principle, a disjunction which although managed by the superego can never be completely erased.

(More later...)

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