

Author's response

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Reply

How right Koppe and Zeuthen are, commenting that my "interpretation of Freud's theory could be more elaborated" and pointing out to the great variety of interpretations on offer (if in doubt, confront the angle of their critique of Freud with that of Brickman's, another of the only three practicing psychoanalysts in our panel). Indeed, interpretation of Freud's work, like that of any other great oeuvre, is likely to remain a never-finalized endeavour: the best conceivable tribute to Freud's ideas' enduring topicality, and their capacity to absorb, digest and enlighten concerns born eons after their creator death; absorb them and digest also in the best conceivable way – by rendering them indispensable to their own conception.

Post-Freudianism is a phenomenon incomparably wider than the totality of studies engaged, by their own admission, in the creative critique or updating of the master's oeuvre. For the sake of honesty, we all could (and should) start self-introductions from repeating the admirable Professor Brickman's phrase: "As a contemporary critic of Freud as well as one of his many admiring beneficiaries" (adding perhaps that having Freud to criticise is perhaps a greatest of our benefits). Just as all psychoanalysis cannot but be post-Freudian (that is, shaping up in relation/reference to Freud, taking sides, inscribing itself into the process of his perpetual resurrection/ reincarnation, even if being silent or censorious about its pedigree), so all the sociology of human cohabitation and human subjectivity would be unthinkable in any other but post-Freudian form. Personally, I am part of the latter, the so to speak 'outer circle' – or to sharpen the point yet further, periphery; grateful to Freud for the hints and clues that enable me, a sociologist, glean the connections that could slip otherwise unnoticed. Not being a Freud's scholar, I readily and willingly accept that my 'interpretation of Freud' could be far, far 'more elaborated' than it has been. But then I borrowed from his toolbox only such instruments which I found particularly relevant to the job of engraving legible contours on the formless ore of current social trends and individual *Lebenswelten*. For this I willingly apologize,

if an apology is needed. In the text under discussion, I was interested solely in the social/political/economic uses of the shifting balance between the 'pleasure principle' and its 'reality' partner/adversary.

Another apology is due to my partners in conversation for my failure to relate to many, perhaps majority of points they've raised: a failure arising partly from the dearth of my professional competence, but mainly from the sheer number and the profound and import of the issues. To be given justice, many of those points would require much more time and space allowed by the 'reply to comments' format. I am immensely grateful to all members of the panel for exposing the limitations and weaknesses of my treatment of Freud's vision of the pleasure/reality interplay, deliberately and admittedly a selective and focused deployment of Freud's idea. It was not however another reading of Freud and another assessment of the truth-value of his suggestion that motivated my search, but the way to comprehend the processes leading to the emaciating/fading/wilting of human bonds in general and inner-family relations in particular; especially, role in which the vitiated story of infant and adult sexualities and their reciprocal relatedness played or has been deployed.

To start with perhaps the most general point: is my belief in the perpetuity of the security-freedom a symptom of excessive and unwarranted optimism (as Zipes suggests), or a similarly uncalled-for pessimism (as argued by Koppe and Zeuthen)? I would rather describe my stance as sceptical – an 'abreaction' to quite a few singled fingers... History of humanity is spattered with false dawns, and (accordingly) history of thought is full of false hopes. Perhaps incurably, we are infused with the (explicit, or repressed even if irrepressible) desire to glean in every novel opportunity the augury of leaving the current trouble or discomfort behind. That inclination has been institutionalized in the modern era (indeed, has become undetachable from the modern way of life) through the idea of progress married to the cult of science and technology. Every or almost every technological breakthrough is introduced and publicly wel-

comed as a remedy for the quandary in which we feel currently embroiled. Since however that promise is not as a rule kept, the pace of circulation, ageing and replacement of assumed/ putative novelties must accelerate, if the trust in the problem-resolution-mediated-by-technologically-driven-progress, that *sine qua non* driving engine of consumerist society, is to be kept alive. The current fascination with 'information highways' as the remedy for wilting of human bonds, fading of citizenship engagement or (last though not at all least) clash between pleasure and reality principles, or with genetic engineering as the remedy for human traumas, psychical affliction and more generally human contingency, fall under that rule. Technological innovations may slow down, make more erratic the movement of the pendulum; but it is highly improbable that they will arrest it, let alone make it redundant.

And to focus on what I suspect to be the genuine (even if background) meta-point of our shared inquiry: at the end of inordinately and unforgivably long studying life I came to the conclusion that freedom and security, the two titanic forces in whose epic duel Freud spotted the origins of 'civilization', are two values equally indispensable to a satisfactory human life (to wit, a life not prompting reform or a rebellion), yet exceedingly difficult, indeed impossible, to satisfactorily reconcile. Their dialectical relation or *Hassliebe* constitutes in my view an anthropological feature of the social animal known as *homo sapiens*. Freedom and security cannot, so to speak, survive without each other, yet can't live at peace with each other either. Another conclusion is that in all likelihood the 'golden mean', or the satisfactory balance between the two is never to be found, though (or rather therefore) the search for it is never to stop. Pendular movement is the outcome of that aporia. Obviously, since the ratios of freedom and security in various parts of society (classes, genders, generations, ethnicities) sharply differ, and the privileges/deprivations of freedom and security are notorious for their highly uneven distribution through the social spectrum, that movement is unlikely to be synchronized and uni-directional for to all contemporaries (one of the causes of the perpetuity of the conservative/ libertarian divide). And so I admit: Koppe's and Zeuthen's charge that I 'do not dissolve the dualities' is fully justified. With one proviso, though: I believe them 'insoluble', and suspect the search of their dissolution of being another version of the pursuit of philosophical stone, perpetuum mobile or the proof of God's existence. Which does not mean that in my view the recurrent attempts at resolution are useless waste of time. After all, a collateral/ serendipitous effect of chasing philosophical stone is modern chemistry, of chasing perpe-

tuum mobile modern physics, just as while busily composing proofs of God's existence theologians paved the way for modern science.

At this point I need to apologize for taking a detour, which I hope to be of some help in the attempt to clarify the issue of our discord. The detour in question leads through the apparently unconnected territory of utopias (I feel partly acquitted by Keith Tester's important reminder that modernity has been, apart from anything else, the age of the novel, and that the history of novel-writing and of modernity overlap in time and reflect each other; as well as by Peter Beilharz's choice of Goethe as a relevant reference point of our discussion. Both Beilharz and Tester know the intentions and meanings of my writing better than me; whenever I wish to reconstitute my stance on an issue, I consult them...)

The utopian thought is an undetachable companion of modern life, but its contents changed considerably throughout the modern era – each successive dominant variety serving a reliable barometer of the momentary balance (or rather imbalance) between the values of freedom and security, and the impulse towards the 'dissolution' of resulting discomforts. In a remarkable article on the persistence of utopia, Miguel Abensour quotes William Morris insisting in 1886 that

men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes it turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name...

Morris wrote of all men, 'men as such', assuming and suggesting that fighting for a 'thing that is not' is the way humans, all humans are: indeed, the defining trait of 'being human'. He believed that for men (and we would add: or women) fighting for such thing is a must, such fight being 'in their nature' ("The 'Not' [or Nicht]", as Ernst Bloch pointed out, "is lack of Something and also escape from that lack; thus it is driving toward what is missing"). If we agree with Morris, we would take utopias to be elaborate, systematized expressions of that crucial aspect of human nature. Utopias were so many attempts to spell out in detail and describe in full that 'thing' for which next fight was to be launched.

Let us note though right away, that however much they might have varied in all other respects, all utopias written by Morris's predecessors and contemporaries (including Morris himself) were blueprints of a world in which battles for 'things that are not' would be no longer on the cards: such battles would be neither required

nor wished, as the last stone would have been already turned and turning any more stones could only detract from the perfection already reached. So if we agree with Morris, the 'big thing' missed, and feverishly sought by people who had it in their nature to fight for things missing and missed (whatever name they gave to the thing they currently yearning after - a temporary, and on the whole contentious name), was, paradoxically, the *end to all fighting*; the end to a need or the must, and a desire, and the desirability, to fight. And the big thing that kept coming about in the aftermath of lost battles (only to turn 'not to be what they meant', and so clearing the ground for other people battling again for the same thing under a different name), was the *condition of having no fight on hands*; just like the armistice that succeeds the hostilities, and as a rule is found falling well short of the bliss that the aftermath of hostilities was imagined and hoped to be. People tended to use their freedom to bring forth a condition which would render that freedom redundant... The restlessness of the compulsive/addicted draftsmen/chasers of utopias was propelled and sustained by intractable desire of rest. People ran into battle chasing the dream of laying arms - forever.

Russell Jacoby proposes to distinguish two sometimes coinciding, yet not necessarily interconnected traditions in modern utopian thought: the 'blueprint' ("The blueprint utopians map out the future in inches and minutes") and the 'iconoclastic' tradition (iconoclastic utopians "dreamt of a superior society" but "declined to give it precise measure"). I propose to retain the name which Jacoby suggests for the second, admittedly 'non-blueprint' utopian tradition, but to re-focus the concept on attributes other than the vagueness or deliberate imprecision. The meaning I suggest is intimated by the very idea of 'iconoclasm', and refers to the intention to deconstruct, demystify and ultimately to debunk the dominant life values and strategies of the time. 'Iconoclastic' are utopias that show that pursuit of those values and strategies, rather than assuring the advent of a superior society or superior life, constitutes an insurmountable obstacle on the road to both. In other words, I propose to unpack the concept of 'iconoclastic utopia' as (like in all utopias) focusing on the critical revision of the ways and means of the present life as the main factor in uncovering of the otherwise suppressed and concealed, and heretofore unknown, possibility of an 'elsewhere', of another 'social reality'. This being the prime interest and preoccupation of 'iconoclastic utopias', no wonder that the alternative to the present remains sketchy; vagueness of anticipatory vision is but a derivative of the prime concern. The principal stake of iconoclastic utopianism is the possibility of an alterna-

tive social reality, not its precise design. Iconoclastic utopias presume, whether overtly or tacitly, that the road to a 'superior society' leads not through drawing boards of the draftsmen, those advanced sorties of the quartermasters of future - but through critical reflection on the extant human practices and beliefs and (to recall Bloch's idea) unmasking/articulating that 'Something that is missing' and so inspire the drive to its creation or recovery.

In William Morris's time, utopias tended to be on the 'blueprint' side. I believe that the time of the iconoclastic utopias has by now arrived instead (though I wouldn't bet on how long it will last) - in a package deal with liquid modernity, obsessive/compulsive DIP (deregulation, individualization, privatization), and consumerism. The better those utopias settle, the clearer becomes the eventual/anticipated/imminent destination of life under their aegis. Each kind of utopia, however, is pregnant with its own dystopias - genetically determined, like all offspring are. When they move into the *Lebenswelt*, the embryos turn into inner demons...

Our contemporary dystopias seem to peep into the other side of the finishing line at the far end of the long journey, started by culture with the prohibition of incest (more correctly, with the birth of the concept of 'incest' - of a prototypical act that can be done but should not, must not be done)... We seem to be closer to that 'other side' now than we have been ever before.

And this for the reason you've spelled out flawlessly in your question: not only sex has been freed from its entanglement with procreation - but the development of new 'genetic engineering' technologies may well allow in a quite near a future the emancipation of procreation from sex... Sex is one of the last bastions of the banes which reason militates against, and which culture, once it had become aware of itself (once it'd passed, as Hegel would've said, from an *sich* to the *für sich* status), had declared to be its mission and ultimate destination do tame or eradicate: the passions, irrational longings, spontaneity, random play of accidents, the rupture separating results from intentions, limits to control, predictability obstinately unattainable and uncertainty immune to reduction - in short, paresis or paralysis of norms and rules and the resulting messiness, randomness, contingency of human life. As long as procreation remains sex-dependent, culture's war against nature cannot be brought to its victorious end. And through procreation, all the subhuman filth standing in the way of made-to-order humans (made to order in more than one sense!) would filter in, and contaminate, the whole of human life. Stubbornly, it will go on setting impassable limits to the rational overhaul of the infuriatingly misconceived, poorly designed world: that irredeemably short

of perfection product of the admittedly blind nature, indifferent as it is to human values, predilections, choices and strivings.

In Houellebecq's *Possibility of an Island* (in my view the most powerful modern dystopia since Zamiatin, Orwell and Huxley, and the first to grasp and reflect so fully the specifically liquid-modern mindset and inner demons), 'Supreme Sister', the 'neohuman' equivalent of St. Paul's role played in the lives of the old-style (that is, *our* style) humans, teaches that conditions of unhappiness (read: of life; courtesy of those current, liquid-modern passions and phobias from which the long journey to 'neohuman' nightmares took off, life had been already rendered indistinguishable from the pursuit of happiness) will persist, must persist 'for so long as women continue to have children'.

Sex all but vanished from life of the late-day clones of the *Possibility of an Island* – except in the solitary ruminations of solitary neohumans trying in vain to recapture the emotions of their distant predecessors which after so many cloned reincarnations they were no longer able to experience. For the neohumans (us, liquid moderns, in case we manage to reach the state of ultimate perfection), each enclosed in his own mini-fortress behind the barbed wire protecting them from 'savages' (that is, whatever remained of old-style humans stuck to their old-style practices), sex is irrelevant. Sex was, after all, a primitive, cottage-industry vehicle of immortality – obtaining solely an 'immortality by proxy', through pedigree diagrams and imagined endless string of successors. Here, in the world of neohumans, immortality is reached directly, personally so to speak, to be consumed privately at the consumer's pleasure; here, no one needs a mother or a father to appear in the world, being as it were self-sufficient in the matters of infinite duration. Here, in the world of self-cloning, everybody is his/her own mother and father rolled into one, and the mystery which successive Daniels struggle in vain to crack is what all that excitement, noise and hullabaloo used to be once about. The number of ostensibly thoughtful people who can't wait to join them is growing by the day. For instance, in *The Guardian* of 1 January 2009, philosopher Dan Dennett sounds truly intoxicated by the mind-boggling prospects: 'When you no longer need to eat to stay alive, or procreate to have offspring, or locomote to have an adventure-packed life, when the residual instincts for these activities might be simply turned off by genetic tweaking, there may be no constant for human nature left at all'. Steven Pinker, psychologist, celebrates the advent of another, perhaps the ultimate, liberation 'of man and consumer' (who obviously came to replace the French Revolution

'l'homme et citoyen' ...): 'This past year (2008) saw the introduction of direct-to-consumer genomics'.

Houellebecq's Daniels try hard to crack the mystery of old-style humans' emotions in vain – just as did Averroes, the hero of one of Jorge Luis Borges' remarkable short stories, 'Averroes' Search', when trying to understand Aristotle. Averroes, the great Muslim philosopher, who set to translate Aristotle's *Poetics*, but "bounded within the circle of Islam, could never know the meaning of the words tragedy and comedy". Indeed, "without ever having suspected what theatre is", Averroes would have to fail when trying "to imagine what a play is". And so the neo-humans of Houellebecq's dystopia would have to fail when trying to imagine what sex is... At least such sex as we, the ancestors of Daniel 1st, know it.

There are other portentous developments as well... On a previous occasion I suggested that in the result of the mutual separation of sex and procreation, sex has been freed to be recycled into 'sextainment' – just another pleasurable entertainment among many to choose from – according to the degree of their availability, facility of access and the balance of gains and losses. But once reduced to entertainment pure and simple, how long can sex retain its attraction and seductive power? The credible answer is: probably, not for long...

However thoroughly has it been cleansed of the off-putting spectre of long-term, taxing and cramping commitments and other 'strings attached', sex wouldn't score high in the league of pleasures/entertainments if the criteria by which pleasures tend to be chosen in the society of consumers go on being applied to it. Being irredeemably an inter-human event in which both partners are endowed with inalienable subjectivity, sex can come nowhere near the facility and instantaneousness with which other, fully reified and commoditized pleasures can be obtained – just in one simple act of parting with few banknotes or typing the credit card's pin. Even when insured against unwelcome long-term consequences, sex requires at least a rudimentary negotiation, currying favours of the partner and ingratiating in his/her eyes, earning a modicum of sympathy, arousing in the prospective partner a degree of desire matching one's own... And then, insured or not, sex intercourse means giving hostages to fate. However intense (and so desirable and coveted) the sexual pleasures, they must be measured against odds considerably more overwhelming than most other pleasures are.

Well, as Tester poignantly suggests, in this respect as well as in many others we are currently in an *interregnum*. Or, in the newspaper language, on crossroads. Or, to borrow from Hippocrates, in the moment of crisis – when the the crucial (and irreversible) choices are

being made. There is no saying where to we will eventually go from here. But I've confessed to 'not dissolving the dualities'...

References

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