

Philippe van Haute and Tomas Geyskens

A Non-Oedipal Psychoanalysis? A Clinical Anthropology of Hysteria in the Works of Freud and Lacan.

Leuven: Leuven University Press 2012.

180 pages

€34.50 (Paperback ISBN 9789058679116)

In *A Non-Oedipal Psychoanalysis? A Clinical Anthropology of Hysteria in the Works of Freud and Lacan*, Van Haute and Geyskens conduct what they call a pathoanalysis or a clinical anthropology of hysteria. In so doing, they situate hysteria as a philosophical problematic; instead of viewing psychopathology as a deviation of a supposed normality they see pathology as indicating, in an exaggerated fashion, ‘the structuring elements of human existence’ (14). Alluding to Nietzsche, they argue that the human being is a ‘sick animal’ which expresses its pathology in various cultural forms. They credit Freud with having begun this project of a clinical anthropology of hysteria in his early work (after rejecting his seduction theory) until he largely abandoned the method in 1909 when he shifted his attention to obsessional neurosis and to the Oedipus complex as being the central causal factor of all psychoneuroses.

Van Haute and Geyskens argue against making the Oedipus complex the cornerstone of psychoanalytic psychopathology on several grounds. First, they claim that it applies not to the psychoneuroses in general but more specifically to one key element of the symptomatology of obsessional neurosis, in which there is an ambivalent relation toward the father (i.e., hate and death wishes on the one hand and love and admiration on the other). Instead, by elucidating Freud’s case of Dora, the *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, Van Haute and Geyskens demonstrate that hysteria is best analyzed with reference to the constitutionally determined libidinal factors including, for example, a bisexual inclination indicating uncertainty regarding not only the object of desire but also the hysteric’s own gender identity. It follows that Freud’s move from the particular to the universal—generalizing the applicability of the Oedipus complex in obsessional neurosis to all neuroses—is unfounded. Second, Van Haute and Geyskens argue that the Oedipus complex introduces a normative element to psychoanalysis such that all neuroses are understood as developmental disorders or defensive reactions against the anxiety that stems from the Oedipal crisis. The idea that the neuroses can be overcome through more adaptive ways of dealing with the Oedipus conflict ‘is at odds with the [pathoanalytical approach or the] idea that psychoneuroses reveal certain dimensions of human existence that go unnoticed in “normal” mental life’ (85). Curiously, although Van Haute and Geyskens reference two works of Gilles Deleuze, they do not mention Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*—a text which shares the radical critique of the Oedipus complex undertaken by Van Haute and Geyskens.

In accordance with their pathoanalytical perspective, Van Haute and Geyskens pay great attention to Freud’s claim that ‘a case of hysteria is a caricature of a work of art, that an obsessional neurosis is a caricature of a religion and that a paranoid delusion is a caricature of a philosophical system’. A chapter of the book is devoted to Freud’s investigation of the relationship between hysteria and literature. Freud suggests that hysterics have a characteristic propensity to daydream, and in their daydreams they often stage wish-fulfillments—such as seducing and being seduced—which are symptomatic of the repression of sexuality. These daydreams can express themselves either on the couch or in literature. Daydreams, then, are the inspiration for the works

of creative writers. Here Van Haute and Geyskens follow Freud too uncritically and, as a result, only superficially pursue their question regarding hysteria's potential to reveal structuring elements of human existence. For instance, clearly obsessional neurotics also daydream and write literature. Goethe, for example, reveals himself as an obsessional neurotic in *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, in which his desire is incited by an impossible love and then sustained as obstacle after obstacle presents itself in the way of his happiness. Freud's sweeping statement also takes philosophy as if it were a monolithic whole in claiming that its roots are paranoiac. That said, there may be something useful in, for instance, seeing the literature and philosophy of de Sade as resulting from his perverse structure and likewise in seeing Kant's philosophy as being inspired by the same obsessive nature which manifested itself in the routine of his daily walks. But perhaps Van Haute and Geyskens' broader point is that literature and psychopathology 'both have their origins in an insurmountable yet commonly human disposition' (155).

Following the discussion of the Oedipus complex and hysteria in Freud's work, Van Haute and Geyskens devote the latter half of the book to a selected review of Lacan's work on those topics. Taking up one of Lacan's interpretations of the Oedipus complex, they point out that in Lacan's seventeenth seminar he called the Oedipus complex 'Freud's dream'. Interpreting it as a dream indicates that Freud's articulation of the Oedipal complex reveals something about Freud's own unconscious desire—a desire which at the same time obscured his vision of the truth of the Oedipus myth. Lacan said that Freud's introduction of the theme of the murder of the father (in the Oedipus complex as well as the *Totem and Taboo* origin myth) is an attempt to obscure the father's castration. In other words, 'in the terminology of *Totem and Taboo*, as long as we believe that collective patricide terminated the father's pleasure, we are also capable of misrecognising the structural character of castration—the impossibility of unlimited pleasure outside the law' (127). The desire in Freud's dream obscured a truth about human life: the structural and inevitable castration of the master which is an effect of language. From another perspective, the master's castration has to do with knowledge. At the same time, Lacan interpreted hysteria as a continuous staging of the truth of the master—that the master is castrated. In making herself into the object-cause of the master's desire, she brings out his lack and tries to embody what he is wanting while simultaneously frustrating the fulfillment of his desire. The hysteric correspondingly incites the master's desire to seek knowledge (to answer the question of who she is at the level of being, and of what she as a woman wants), and each answer he gives her is by definition structurally deficient.

Another major point Van Haute and Geyskens highlight is Lacan's explication of the practice of courtly love and courtly poetry as it reveals something about our relation to desire. They explain that in Lacan's view courtly love (because of the class difference between the minstrel and the lady and because of the lady's belonging to another man) concerns a love that aims at the absence of satisfaction, and is thus 'a 'scholastics of unhappy love' in which the institution of lack plays an essential role...Courtly love sings the praises of the structural impossibility of desire's fulfillment and it does so by way of the lady's *idealisation*, which puts her out of reach' (115). In this sense, unlike frustration, in which the object of desire—an object which would somehow satisfy and put an end to desiring—falsely appears as attainable, courtly poetry articulates the 'structural character of lack from which desire originates' (115) without denial or defense. Courtly love's goal is the activity of courtly love itself rather than in the attainment of some object or end. Courtly poetry, then, provides one example of a possible way to encounter castration (or the lack inherent in the symbolic order) that goes beyond neurosis.

The unanalyzed hysteric, on the other hand, misrecognizes lack as being bound up in the dialectic of demand instead of desire. Demand implies an object which can satisfy it, whereas desire implies an unfillable lack. Van Haute and Geyskens point out that Dora and other hysterics remain ‘imprisoned in the problematic of frustration: they continue to want to acquire that which they lack, to which they feel themselves *entitled*’ (159; italics in the original). The hysteric attempts to overcome the lack inherent in subjectivity by embodying that lack for an Other—in other words, by being the phallus or the object-cause of the Other’s desire. The hysteric fears being reduced to the object of the Other’s demand, to losing her subjectivity by being the object-cause of the Other’s *jouissance*. To deal with this, she sustains her desire (and that of the Other) ‘only by the lack of satisfaction [the hysteric] gives [the Other] by slipping away as object’ (Lacan, *Écrits*, 824/321). The hysteric identifies with her partner and thus desires as if she were him or her. Accordingly, the hysteric’s strategy for sustaining her desire is to desire unfulfilled desires.

In their comparison of these two different strategies (courtly love and hysteria) for dealing with the problematic of desire, Van Haute and Geyskens conclude that the assumption of castration that occurs in courtly love is unable to permanently replace the experience of frustration. ‘Fundamentally, human existence occurs in an insurmountable, strenuous relationship between the misrecognition of lack (frustration) and the acceptance of its structural character’ (159). More generally, one of Van Haute’s and Geyskens’ main conclusions is that ‘no one escapes pathology, just as no one ever escapes culture or even literature. In this model, then, sublimation does not necessarily free us from the need to form symptoms. Here there is only room for differences in degree: *the human being is literally suspended between pathology and culture*’ (117; italics in the original).

A strength of the book is that Van Haute and Geyskens make Freud and Lacan accessible to those who may have only a cursory knowledge of the two thinkers and their often confusing technical terminology. Van Haute and Geyskens’ careful explication of two of Freud’s clinical cases (Dora and the young homosexual woman) serves as the evidential ground from which they pose theoretical claims regarding hysteria and its implications for human existence. Correspondingly, this book may serve as an excellent beginning text for philosophers to inquire into the field of psychoanalysis. Van Haute and Geyskens raise a number of points which may be fruitful to pursue in more depth and from certain philosophical perspectives (especially metaphysical), including the hysteric’s relation to knowledge and the non-rapport between the symbolic and the real or language and the void.

Stephanie Swales Scalabrino
Independent Scholar, Texas